



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

3 3433 07608866 9

THE GAME OF DOEG

HARRIS



Fiction (American)
Jenssen Peters

Fiction (American)

MAR 18 1915

F. I.
Harris
123



THE GAME OF DOEG



THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.



THEY DROVE TO THE MOUNTAIN TOPS. HERE (PAGE 47)



The Game Of Doeg

**A STORY OF THE
HEBREW PEOPLE**

BY

ELEANOR E. HARRIS

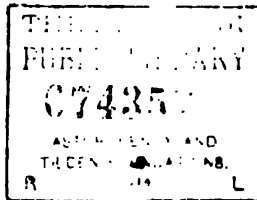
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALFRED FEINBERG



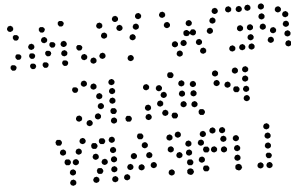
PHILADELPHIA

The Jewish Publication Society of America

1914



COPYRIGHT, 1914, BY
THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.....	9
II. THE LITTLE ONE.....	25
III. A FRIEND AT COURT.....	35
IV. THE MINSTREL	47
V. THE GAME OF DOEG.....	62
VI. A CHAMPION	77
VII. A JEALOUS KING.....	92
VIII. A BROKEN PLEDGE.....	103
IX. THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS.....	119
X. THE SWORD OF GOLIATH.....	135
XI. A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS.....	150
XII. THE WITCH OF ENDOR.....	170
XIII. THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA.....	180

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE PRINCE SHOT THE ARROWS BEYOND HIM (page 137) ..	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
HE WAS FOND OF PLAYING THE HARP	<i>facing page</i>	42
A MOMENT LATER THE EVIL FACE OF DOEG APPEARED		
AT THE OPENING	“ “	140
THE MONARCH FACED AROUND SUDDENLY	“ “	158
“ WHY HAST THOU DISQUIETED ME, TO BRING		
ME UP? ”	“ “	178



CHAPTER I

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

IT was a spring day many hundred years ago, when the people of Israel lived in Palestine, and Saul was their king.

Tired, hot, and dusty, the laborers toiled from terrace to terrace up the hill, to the gate of the little walled city of Bethlehem, men and boys, women and girls. The gate stood wide open, and a brilliant sunset made the strong watch-towers that flanked it on either side shine as if burnished with gold. A beautiful golden light hung over the gardens and fruit-trees that spread close to the walls on every side, and the distant olive groves looked almost black against the background of fire. Overhead the sky was very blue. The people were coming in from their work in the fields and vineyards, driving cows and goats before them.

Arrived at the wide, open space inside the gate, many stopped for a few moments to refresh themselves with a drink of cool water from the well in the center, or to lounge on the benches near by and compare notes on the day's work. Some stopped at the market-place, which was not far from the gate, to get

THE GAME OF DOEG

something needed for the supper at home. The cows and goats took their leisurely way through the narrow streets, each headed for its own stable to be milked.

While the people were talking together, a burly fellow, called Doeg, who had lived but a few months in the town, appeared among them.

“Strange news!” he exclaimed. “This day I have had speech with a man of King Saul’s house, and this man told me that Samuel, our judge, who put King Saul, the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin, upon his throne, and made him ruler over us, is angry with the king, and hath refused to help him in his battles or even to see him again.”

Hearing this, the elders of the town crowded around and questioned Doeg, who liked nothing better than to have a piece of news to tell.

“It is reported,” he went on, “that in a great battle with the Amalekites, King Saul permitted his soldiers to seize upon the spoil, though Samuel had commanded him to spare nothing. He tried to excuse himself to Samuel by saying that he had taken only the best of the sheep and oxen and other things to sacrifice to the Lord, but the judge was very angry and turned away, and would not accept such an excuse. As he was going, the king became desperate, and caught hold of the skirt of Samuel’s mantle to detain him, and tore a great hole in it.”

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

Doeg paused to note the effect of his story on the people.

“What happened, O Doeg?” they crowded around.

“This happened,” said Doeg. “Samuel turned his head and looked King Saul in the eye, and said, ‘The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou.’ Now, good people, make what you please of this great scandal in Israel. I have told you just what was told to me, and by my sacred beard it is enough, I should say, if it is true, and I doubt it not.”

“If this story reaches the ears of our enemies, they will come against us and overpower us,” wailed an old man in a high-pitched voice.

“Did not the man of God warn us against having a king?” cried another. “But we insisted upon having a king like other nations, and now see what hath come to pass.”

Doeg began to chuckle in his beard as he watched the anxiety of the simple farming people.

“What are you laughing at, Doeg?” exclaimed a woman, who stood, with a pitcher of water on her head, ready to start for her home. “If what you say is true, it is a very serious matter, is it not?”

Doeg only laughed more. “Why,” said he, “the way things are coming to pass amuses me. I know

THE GAME OF DOEG

all about this king, who is so handsome and higher from his shoulders and upward than any other man in the kingdom. I was in the employ of Kish, Saul's father, when Samuel chose him out to be king over this land. I went with Saul to hunt for the asses. You remember, it was when he was hunting for his father's asses that were lost that he was first called to be king. It was I who advised the young man to go to the man of God to inquire about the asses, and so it was I who gave him his first chance of meeting the man of God. I know all about that business. They sent Saul to the school for prophets, where he studied law and poetry and religious music, and learned the sacred dances, and later, when he was proclaimed king, and all the people shouted, 'God save the king,' he forgot that I had ever done him a service. He had grown so fine in his tastes that he would have only handsome men near him, and Doeg is not handsome, as you see, my good friends, not handsome at all, by my sacred beard. But look, friends, who comes!"

All the heads turned toward the gate to which Doeg pointed. An old man clad in priestly robes appeared, laboriously ascending the last rise of the terrace, and leading a red heifer by a rope of twisted leather. He was tall and dignified in aspect, though somewhat bent with age. On his head he had a turban much taller than those ordinarily worn. His

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

snowy beard extended below the girdle that confined his long gown at the waist, and his long hair hung in loose curls below his shoulders. Keen black eyes, undimmed by age, looked out from beneath shaggy, beetling brows. His nose was bent like the beak of an eagle, and had it not been for a certain gentle, pathetic look about the mouth, he might have seemed quite stern and forbidding in the eyes of the simple townspeople.

As for the red heifer, she evidently was not accustomed to being led. She tugged at the rope, kicked up her heels in a frisky manner every now and then, and occasionally emitted a doleful low.

Presently the pair stood in the gateway, and the old man, passing his hand over the heifer's neck, held her by one horn, to keep her still.

"It is the prophet! The man of God!" whispered one to another, casting frightened glances about.

Doeg pushed his way to the front. "By my beard!" he ejaculated in half-suppressed tones. "It is Samuel, the supreme judge. Have I not told you I know him? He is here on no light errand, you may depend upon it. Some sin hath been committed in the city, and he is bound to judge us for it."

"If that is true," said a tall, handsome young man at Doeg's elbow, "God grant the offender may

THE GAME OF DOEG

be discovered, so that judgment may not fall upon the whole town."

"In my opinion," spoke up a comely young matron, who was in the act of filling a pitcher with water from the well, "the man of God will have reason to pass judgment upon us all for the sin of rudeness and neglect to obey the most common laws of politeness, if we let him stand at the gate unwelcomed much longer. Approach him respectfully, husband," she continued, addressing the young man before mentioned, "salute him, offer him entertainment, and ask him if he comes in peace."

"Thou art right, Hannah, but Doeg knows him, let him go," returned the young man, hesitating.

"O, I would not put myself forward to that extent," Doeg declared. "The judge would not recognize a common man like me or even remember my name, even though I am the servant who was ordered to walk on before while he anointed his king. Besides, thy family is of some importance in the town, and I am only a sojourner among you. It is more fitting that thou shouldst go."

Thus urged, the young man advanced to meet the stranger. He bowed low, for he had been well brought up, and he said, "The Lord be with thee." The judge bowed also, but more slightly, and replied, "The Lord bless thee, my son." After a few moments' conversation, the young man, reassured

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

by the kindly manner of the judge, made bold to ask, "Comest thou peaceably among us, father?"

"I come peaceably," was the answer. "I have business with Jesse, the son of Obed, of the house of Judah, who, I am told, lives in this city, and I have brought this heifer to make a feast withal."

The young woman at the well, who had been watching and listening intently, waited only to hear these words. Placing her pitcher of water on her shoulder and supporting it with one hand, she walked rapidly away.

"Thy servant is Eliab, the son of Jesse," the young man hastened to say. "My father is an old man, at home. These are my younger brothers."

He designated, as he spoke, several young fellows, and presented them to the judge, who greeted each in turn, saying words of praise about the man who had raised so large a family of handsome sons. The judge then assured the townspeople that his mission was one of peace, and bade them go quietly away to their homes. Then, turning to Eliab again, he said, "Call thy brothers, and we shall sacrifice the heifer at some place outside the gate, and bring part of the meat to thy father's house, where it shall be prepared, and we shall eat together."

This was done at once. A large stone was found at some distance from the gate, and there the pretty red heifer was sacrificed, according to the religious

THE GAME OF DOEG

customs of the time. Judge Samuel, or the "man of God," as he was often called, then accompanied the brothers to their home, to partake of the meat with them. All meat was cooked as soon as possible after the animal had been killed, for in the warm climate of Palestine flesh could not be kept long. It was no unusual thing to kill a lamb or a heifer and cook the meat immediately after. The only strange thing was that the little town of Bethlehem should be visited by a man whose influence was greater in the land than that of the king.

Meantime the young wife of Eliab, carrying her pitcher of water and also some fine flour, which she had procured at the market as she passed, hastened home and burst in upon her parents-in-law with the astonishing news. The old couple were exceedingly alarmed at first, as the people of the town had been. These simple country folk could not imagine so great a man coming to their humble home for any other purpose than to pronounce judgment upon some of them for a sin committed by them.

"Didst thou hear any murmuring against the house of Jesse among the people, my daughter?" the father hastened to ask.

"Not a whisper have I heard of any wrong deed among us," Hannah declared.

"Has fault been found with any of my sons?" the mother cried almost in the same breath.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

"I distinctly heard the man of God say, 'I come peaceably,'" Hannah replied. "He will eat with us this night. We must keep the oven hot for the meat, and I have brought a little fine flour from the market to make some cakes."

While she talked, Hannah hastily cleansed her person from the soil of a day's work in the field.

"Thou art right, my daughter," said her mother, "it is best for us to hurry and prepare entertainment for the man of God. Get a bottle of the best wine, and some dates and raisins as well as fresh fruit, and I shall roll out the cakes. I am glad you got the fine flour."

Hannah started to obey, but turned back, saying, "Mother, I think the man of God belongs to that order of men who drink no wine. His hair is very long, far below his shoulders, and parted in the middle, and his dress is coarse and plain."

"True enough, Hannah, the man is a Nazarite. I remember now to have heard that his good mother consecrated him to the service of the Lord from his very birth. My mother has told me too that he was brought up in the temple, with Eli the priest. Put no wine on the table, but water instead, and plenty of fruit, but no grapes. A Nazarite never touches the fruit of the vine. Here, see to the cakes, daughter. This heat is too much for my poor old head. Thou, little Ben, go out to the door and watch for thy

THE GAME OF DOEG

masters. Be sure to serve the judge first, and forget not thy manners."

The last was addressed to a little slave boy who had been hanging around the kitchen door listening. He now pattered through the hall on his bare, brown feet to the street door, and sat down on the step. Many passers-by who had witnessed the unusual scene at the city gate shortly before cast interested glances towards the house of Jesse.

A savory stew of meat and broth that had been intended for the evening meal simmered on the fire. This Hannah removed, for the flesh of the heifer would be used in its stead, and she began to place the cakes, which her mother had rolled out thin, on the top of the clean, hot stove to bake, turning them until both sides were browned. They were very much like pancakes or large round crackers in shape.

"Run to the lattice, Hannah, and see if they are coming," the mother called, growing more and more nervous as time passed.

One narrow window covered by latticework looked out upon the street from the guest-room. This lattice was the only opening in the front wall of the building, aside from the front door. All the other windows as well as several doors opened on an inner court, around the four sides of which the house was built. In the middle of the paved court the cool, sweet waters of a fountain bubbled up into a basin

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

hollowed out of solid rock. In this court Jesse paced restlessly to and fro while waiting for his guests.

The roof of the house was flat and surrounded by a parapet, of the thickness of the house wall and about three feet high. This cozy and safe enclosure was used as a summer dining-room, sitting-room, and during the hottest weather even sleeping-room. The guest-chamber was the only upper room, and from the roof a door led into it. The main part of the house was only one story high. A stairway from the court led up to the roof. Up this stairway Hannah flew at her mother's bidding, quite forgetting that she had worked all day in the hot sun, and was very tired. Into the guest-room she ran and peeped out at the lattice, for she heard voices in the street. Yes, the expected party stood at the door! She ran out to the roof again, to put the low round table in order and to draw up mats and cushions for the men to sit upon during the meal. In haste though she was, she did not fail to put on her best golden bracelets, her anklets, necklace, and ear-rings, besides taking many a glance at her comely self in the little hand-mirror that hung at her girdle. Then down-stairs again by a narrow private stairway leading from one corner of the roof to the back part of the house, and she was just in time to receive the fresh meat from Eliab at the door of the kitchen.

Jesse met his distinguished guest at the door with

THE GAME OF DOEG

due ceremony, extending his wrinkled hands and bending his aged form in obeisance as low as he could, though not quite to the ground, as the rank of the judge demanded, for age had made him stiff in the joints, and he had long been unused to paying such extreme deference. Jesse was one of the chief elders of the town, more accustomed to receive obeisance than to give it.

The little slave dropped upon his knees to unfasten the great man's sandals. Sandals are the soles of shoes fastened to the foot with straps and laces, and as the people did not wear stockings, the feet naturally became soiled when walking or working in the field. The floors of the houses were made of stone, brick, or cement, covered with rugs of various sizes. Every one, whether man, woman, or child, took off his sandals upon entering, and washed his feet, that no soil or dust from the street might be brought in. The floor in Jesse's house was of stone and very clean.

The little slave's hands trembled at first, for he was overcome with awe at being asked to wash the feet of so venerable and great a man in the kingdom as Judge Samuel. Little Ben was accustomed to such work. It was one of his daily duties. His little fingers were very skilful at untying knots in the laces and unfastening the buckles. In spite of his nervousness, he very soon had removed all the sandals. Jesse led the way with the judge, the young men followed,

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

the slave with the sandals brought up the rear, and all passed, barefooted, straight through the hall to the court with the fountain.

The men seated themselves upon the low settees arranged on two sides of the square, while the slave brought water and towels for the hands and feet. First he presented the water for the hands, and afterwards, kneeling upon the floor, he carefully washed and wiped the feet of each man, the judge first, then the brothers in order, beginning with the eldest. This ceremony, which might be called one of the necessary luxuries of Oriental life, being over, they passed up the stairs to the roof, where the cool evening breezes would further refresh them.

The judge showed so friendly an interest in the young men that Jesse, being old and somewhat garrulous, began to relate the personal characteristics of his sons and to tell in what particular each excelled. One was a vine-dresser, another understood the growing of fruit-trees, the others tended the vegetable gardens and the fields of grain. All could throw stones with the sling and hit the mark within a hair's breadth. Two of them were betrothed, and would be married as soon as they had earned a sufficient dowry. As far as looks were concerned, the judge declared he could make no choice. All were handsome, with glossy, dark, curling hair, keen, black eyes, and tall, sinewy frames. There were seven of them, and they all

THE GAME OF DOEG

blushed modestly at being so complimented. Eliab thought, as he was the oldest, he would surely receive some mark of special favor before the evening was over.

“Are all thy children here?” the judge asked, as a servant appeared at the top of the stairs, to announce that supper would be served.

“There is yet a little one, David, the youngest. He is with the sheep,” Jesse replied.

“Send and fetch him by all means. I want to see all thy sons together. We cannot possibly sit down till he comes,” cried the judge, rubbing his hands together and stroking his venerable beard, as if the idea of seeing all the brothers together pleased him immensely.

There was no help for it, though all were hungry, and the supper was waiting. It was long past the usual supper hour, but the judge's will was law. The slave boy Ben was dispatched with all speed after David, and bidden to take Doeg, who was a shepherd, and who often worked for the herdsmen of the town, with him to guard the flock. Ben was sent, because, being tall and slender and very nimble, he could run faster than any of the other slaves or servants. Through the narrow streets he sped, like a low-flying swallow, but he could see nothing of Doeg. The man was not in his accustomed haunts, and as the importance of the occasion admitted of no delay, Ben

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

quickly decided that he must go on alone, and stay with the sheep till his master could send some one.

The herdsmen and farmers of Palestine, instead of living widely separated upon their farms, as is the custom in this country at the present day, had their homes together in walled towns, from which they went out to work in the fields and to care for the flocks. Shepherds always remained with the cattle by night as well as by day, to guard them from the beasts, which often crept down out of their mountain dens, and from prowling bands of robbers, who might feel inclined to appropriate part of the flock to their own use. It was also common for watchmen to remain in charge of the more distant gardens from the time of planting or blossoming till after the harvest. All who were not employed in some such manner went home to their city at night, and when it grew dark they shut and locked the gate.

When little Ben reached the gate of Bethlehem, it was already shut and locked, but the gatekeeper let him through when he heard his errand. The boy was timid, afraid of his own shadow, and he had all sorts of notions in his head about unlucky signs. Yet he was brave at heart, and never thought of turning back. His mind was made up. He darted through the gate, and began to thread his way down the winding path of the hillside, as sure-footed and fleet as a mountain goat, past the gardens, orchards, and vineyards. The

THE GAME OF DOEG

country outside the safely walled city was broken into small valleys, strips of level plain, hills, and rocky gorges. Hidden away among the rocks in the sides of the ravines were numerous dens and caves, where wild beasts lurked and robbers hid themselves. No wonder that little Ben was frightened. But he was only a slave boy and knew that he must obey. Besides, he liked the sturdy shepherd boy David better than any of the other sons of Jesse. He knew that it was a great honor for the judge to ask to see him, and he did not want David to miss this great opportunity. Surely some unusual good fortune must be in store for David.

On and on sped the slave boy. Dark shadows were gathering all around. A fox sprang across his pathway. Suddenly a huge dark form leaped out from behind a clump of bushes at one side and seized him by the arm.

CHAPTER II

THE LITTLE ONE



HE boy uttered a cry of fright. Recognizing the burly Doeg, whom he had been in search of, he tried to jerk himself away. But the man kept a grip on his clothing.

“What art thou screaming for, thou little fool? Dost thou not know Doeg?” demanded the fellow, roughly. “Now, tell me where thou art going so late at night, or I shall dip thee into this slimy cistern till thou learnest better manners.” Then, without giving the trembling boy a chance to explain, he added: “Running away from thy master, I’ll be bound! Speak, I say!”

“Thy servant is about his master’s business, and it need be none of thine,” returned the child, whose blood was now at the boiling point. He was only a slave, but he felt that Doeg had no right to detain him, much less to question him about his master’s affairs, and so, though Doeg was the very man he had been in search of, and though he dreaded the idea of being left alone with the flock, his anger got the better of his discretion, and he would not explain matters.

THE GAME OF DOEG

“ Now, by my sacred beard,” cried his persecutor, “ thou art an insolent young one ! What if thy master should in some way find out how impudent thou art to his good friend Doeg ? What would save thy neck from the rope ? ”

The boy was now thoroughly frightened, and he began to cry. Yet between sobs he managed to make Doeg understand the errand on which he had been sent and the need of haste.

“ Well,” declared Doeg, at length, “ mend thy manners, and it may be I shall oblige thy master. Speed on thine errand, or thou wilt get the rope as it is. But stay ! Since thou art so independent, perhaps thou wouldst rather stay with the flock thyself when thou hast sent David to feast with the judge. Canst thou keep the lion at bay when he comes up from the parched river bank into the hill country, or defend the sheep from the great bear when she creeps out of her den and thinks she will take a lamb to her young ones ? Thou foolish stripling ! ”

The picture was sufficiently horrifying. The slave did not know that neither lions nor bears were likely to approach the flock when it lay so near the city as that night. He fell on his knees, and with tears besought Doeg not to leave him alone.

“ Ah ! Now thou art humble and in a proper frame of mind. Get on thy feet and run to thy master, and bid him make haste, for I will follow,”

THE LITTLE ONE

Doeg said, and as the slave ran nimbly away, he muttered, "The judge, or the man of God, as the people call him, may well have his own purposes to serve. This king of his, whom he bragged about so much at first as being bigger and handsomer and abler than any other man in the country, is not obedient enough to his commands to suit him. Perhaps he is on the lookout for another that pleases him better. Who knows! Because the judge can't make his own sons obey him, is it any sign that he can't dethrone one king and set up another if he pleases? King Saul is getting too independent, indeed, and Doeg knows more about the making and unmaking of kings than he has credit for. King Saul would better not have forgotten his servant when he came into his kingdom."

The slave ran on with the tears drying in streaks on his hot, little face and fierce wrath against the brutal Doeg in his young heart. "I shall not be a slave always," he thought wildly, "and when I am grown up and my own master, that old Doeg shall suffer for what he does to me now I am little and can't help myself."

With these thoughts in his mind he reached the door of David's tent in the valley close to the enclosure in which the sheep and lambs lay huddled all about in the sweet, warm night under the stars.

"The man of God is come," he panted, "and thy

THE GAME OF DOEG

father hath sent for thee to come home. They wait supper till thou art come."

"What strange story is this?" David exclaimed. "What has the man of God to do with the youngest son of my father's house, and who will stay with these sheep?"

At that moment Doeg strode up. "Haste thee, David, son of Jesse," cried the man, boisterously. "The table is prepared, and Judge Samuel sits in thy father's house, and will not eat until thou art come to sit down with thy brothers."

"What means this unusual thing?" demanded David. "I am the littlest one in my father's house and of the least account. I only tend the sheep and lambs. Come, thou art joking. Go back and leave me in peace."

"It is even as I say," said Doeg. "Get thee gone with speed."

"It is true, master," cried little Ben, excitedly. "Even I heard the judge say, 'I want to see all thy sons together. We cannot possibly sit down till he comes. Send and fetch him by all means.' And thy father bade thy servant find Doeg and send him to take thy place with the flock, but I could not find Doeg, and so I came by myself. By the middle vineyard he sprang out and frightened me, but when I told him the truth he came on with me."

"It is very strange," mused David, as he tightened

THE LITTLE ONE

his girdle, took his shepherd's staff in his hand, and started on a run, the slave following close behind.

Arrived at the city gates, which had been closed and locked with a great wooden key, they were obliged to pound vigorously for some moments before the sleepy watchman got up and opened them. At last they were in, and soon they had arrived at Jesse's house.

"So this is thy little one?" the judge said when David stood before him. "He is a well-grown child and strong of limb."

Unlike his brothers' hair, David's was of a tawny color, verging upon auburn. It hung in thick, bushy curls down to his shoulders. His eyes were large and of a bright brownish blue. his skin fair, and his cheeks red.

"The boy is scarcely fifteen," his father said, "and, indeed, I had not realized how he was growing. As he is the youngest, I called him the little one."

"I am well pleased with the lad," the judge declared, taking the blushing boy by the hand and leading him to the table. "He is well-knit and sturdy and of a beautiful countenance."

The brothers looked on in astonishment when he drew David to a seat at his right hand, and motioned to Jesse to sit on the left. Eliab thought it more fitting that his father should sit on the right hand and himself on the left, but here was the youngest and

THE GAME OF DOEG

in his opinion the least important member of the family honored above all the rest.

“Surely there is no accounting for tastes,” thought the elder brother, while his hopes of preferment sank into nothingness.

And now the fragrant stew was placed in the middle of the table, and the cakes of fine flour were passed around. The judge pronounced a lengthy blessing, and the dinner began. The table was not furnished with plates, but each person used one of the flat, thin cakes as a plate, upon which he placed a portion of meat after fishing it out of the stew with his fingers. They broke other cakes in pieces, dipping a morsel at a time into the broth and conveying it to the mouth. A number of quaint, pretty cups were on the table, from which they drank water. Fresh, ripe figs and a delicious salad also formed part of the meal.

A tent-like awning, open at the sides and supported by poles, had been stretched over the heads of the company, that they might not feel the heavy dew of the evening. A lamp of curious workmanship, having a covered top, with a handle at one end and a wick protruding from a spout at the other, stood on one side of the table. Its uncertain flame cast weird reflections upon the figures that sat or half reclined on the cushions around the low table.

The abundant, snowy tresses of the two aged men

THE LITTLE ONE

showed in vivid relief against the circle of youths with their rich coloring and jet black hair. There were occasional glances, half shy, half jealous, in the direction of David, the "little one," who sat so close to the man of God that his tawny curls mingled with the white. The loose sleeves of their Oriental garments fell back from the arm whenever one reached to dip his morsel in the broth, displaying now the strong sinews of youth and again the shrunken muscles of old age.

Hannah, in her best gown and embroidered girdle, with mirror and reticule attached, her dark braids partially covered by her matron's cap, her gaudy jewels catching occasional gleams from the flickering blaze of the lamp, passed in and out around the table serving the food, or waited at intervals in the background.

The aged wife of Jesse, the mother of those eight handsome youths, had crept up the stairway, and sat in a sheltered corner of the battlements, where none could see her, while she watched with humble pride and pleasure, and wondered like the others why her youngest son should be given the seat of honor.

All along the roofs of the houses, which were built close together with a parapet between, were many similar awnings, with now and then a gleaming light. The dark outlines of dancing figures appeared above the battlements, the sound of merry laughter and the

THE GAME OF DOEG

sweet music of the dulcimer and the harp filled the air, and the stars shone in the low-hanging sky.

The judge passed one arm over David's shoulders, and talked softly in his ear. Soon he unfastened the horn that hung at his girdle, and, lifting it, poured some drops of richly perfumed oil upon the boy's head. Wonder of wonders! What would happen next! Surely the old judge was in his dotage, to make so much of the baby of the family, this young shepherd boy, who knew nothing at all but to tend the sheep. A queer eye for beauty he had too, the brothers thought, to admire that brush of tawny hair more than their glossy black locks, and those red cheeks and that white forehead above their clear olive tints of complexion. So to honor a child as to pour oil upon his head, was more than they could understand. The old man, Jesse, was pleased that the judge should have honored any one of his sons. He would rather it had been Eliab, but they were simple farming people, and Jesse was glad of the preferment of any of his sons, even the smallest and youngest. The brothers dared not so much as look the astonishment they felt.

When the supper was over, slaves brought towels, a basin, and a pitcher of water, that every one in turn might wash his hands. The remnants of the food were removed, and for a long time they sat, while the venerable judge talked with Jesse, and the sons

THE LITTLE ONE

listened respectfully. David sat shy and quiet close by the judge, his blue eyes with the bright brownish tints in them gazing wonderingly out upon the night and up to the gleaming stars. He had had strange secrets whispered into his ear that night. Even while he sat so still, his pulses beat with the wonder of what he had heard. And he was to keep those wonderful things in his heart and go back to the tending of his sheep and lambs until he should be a man—then—What would his father and mother think? What would his brothers say?

Very early the next morning, before it was light, the judge, who had passed the night in the guest-room, descended to the court to take his leave, for he wished to travel to his own city before the heat of the day. David was already up and preparing to go back to his flocks in the fields. He had hoped to see the man of God once more. A slave brought the judge's sandals, clean and fresh, and adjusted them. Just then Jesse came into the court to bid his venerable guest farewell.

Very soon the judge took his leave, and David accompanied him feeling childishly happy. He was glad to go before his brothers were up, because he was a little afraid of their teasing him and asking him questions, and he did not want to tell any of the wonderful things the man of God had whispered to him at the table. They went out of the city gates so early

THE GAME OF DOEG

that there were very few people at the well or in the market-place, and the shepherds and vine-dressers were just beginning to gather to go back to the day's work in the field, but there were enough to tell all the rest of the inhabitants of the town how David, the youngest son of Jesse, had walked through the city gate with the mighty judge Samuel. The family of Jesse became at once very important in the eyes of every one, and the story of the heifer, the sacrifice of the animal outside the city gate, and the supper at Jesse's home were upon every lip.

At the foot of the hill, below the city of Bethlehem, the man of God and David parted. The judge laid his hand on David's head, and said, "Remember, God hath chosen thee to be king of thy people. Be righteous and obedient to His commands, and thou shalt overcome all thine enemies." The boy stood in the path gazing reverently at the retreating form of the judge, till it blended with the morning mist and disappeared. Then he turned aside into the valley.

It was still so dark that one could see only a little distance around; yet he had no thought of danger, the fold being so close to the city. His sandaled feet passed noiselessly over the grass. He was thinking of the judge's last words, "Thou shalt overcome all thine enemies," when a fearful apparition hurled itself at him out of the mist.

CHAPTER III

A FRIEND AT COURT



THE next instant David was wrestling with some creature in mortal combat. It was a full-grown lion, and a lamb fell from its reeking jaws. David felt the strength of ten lions surging in his veins. He seized the brute by the tail close to the body, and swung it round and round with all his might. His lionship was at a serious disadvantage. "God has not chosen me to be king over this land to let me be killed by a lion the first thing," was the thought David had in his mind as he struggled. "Thou shalt overcome, thou shalt overcome," kept ringing in his ears. Finally, summoning all his power, he drove the beast's head against a great boulder with such force that its neck was broken.

The contest had lasted only a few minutes, and, just as the dawn broke, Doeg, who had heard a strange noise, came running up from the fold where he had been with the sheep, and beheld David leaning exhausted upon his staff, the dead lion before him and a trembling lamb in the bushes close by. It had

THE GAME OF DOEG

escaped with nothing worse than a slit in one of its long ears and the loss of a mouthful of wool.

“By my sacred beard!” exclaimed the astonished Doeg. “Thou art a Samson in very truth!”

Doeg’s beard was his only claim to beauty, and he alluded to it on every possible occasion. He had a retreating forehead, his skin was an unhealthy saffron, his expression repulsive and villainous, but his beard, his beloved darling, was soft and black and curling and of unusual length.

Doeg would have taken the lamb in his arms, to carry it back to the fold, but David, seeing his intention, sprang forward, saying, “I tore it out of the lion’s mouth; let me have it,” and picking it up he laid it gently in a fold of his cloak.

“Was Doeg asleep, that he permitted a lion to enter the fold and carry away a lamb?” asked David, rather sharply, stroking the trembling little creature in his arms.

“It must have strayed away and not come in with the others,” answered Doeg, glibly, but in his heart there was anger aroused by David’s criticism of him. They walked back together, Doeg dragging the carcass of the lion. One sheep was bleating distractedly, and David knew that it was her lamb that had been seized by the lion. He put the little thing in his arms down by her side, and watched her evident joy at having her infant back again. She pressed her head

A FRIEND AT COURT

against his knee as if to thank him, and David felt elated, because he had been strong enough to kill the lion and save the lamb alive.

By the rising sunlight they skinned the beast, and stretched the shaggy coat out to dry and cure it.

“Had he set those claws in thy garments, David, the battle had not gone so well with thee,” commented Doeg. “To grasp him by the tail was thy only chance; with the lamb in his mouth he was at a disadvantage at first.”

“He had no chance of his life after I laid hold on him,” laughed the shepherd boy, “but”—and David became serious at once—“I did not do this thing by myself alone; it was the Lord God that put strength into my arms.”

“Verily, it was the Lord,” agreed Doeg, piously. “But the honor to thee is all the greater, for some youths, had they been called out of the sheepfold to sit at table with the great Judge Samuel, would have felt so puffed up with pride that they would not have called upon the Lord for help in such a case. They would have attempted it in their own strength—and failed of course.”

“I have very little to be proud of,” said David. “I am the youngest and smallest of my father’s sons. All my brothers are taller and handsomer than I.”

“Beauty is largely a matter of opinion,” said Doeg. “There may be some who prefer a ruddy skin to an

THE GAME OF DOEG

olive or a brown complexion, and tawny hair to jet black locks. There may be some even who would consider Doeg handsome," and he stroked his curling black beard affectionately. "But enlighten me, I pray thee, upon the object of Judge Samuel's visit."

"We sat together at supper on the housetop," David replied, "but why my father's house should have been chosen, or why I should have been preferred above my brothers, I cannot say."

"Very well, if the matter is a secret, keep it to thyself. But it hath come to my ears, and I was telling the story at the well even as Judge Samuel came in at the gate, that the man of God hath cast off King Saul."

David remained silent, gazing up toward the stars. Doeg went on and told David all the story he had told the people by the well: how King Saul had torn Samuel's mantle, and how the judge had said, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than thou."

Doeg's stock in trade was his knowledge of other people's business, and he wanted very much to know what had happened at the supper at Jesse's house. David said nothing about it, however, for the judge had cautioned him to keep what he had told him hidden in his heart and to tell no one. The longer David kept silent, the angrier Doeg grew, but he con-

A FRIEND AT COURT

cealed his anger, and determined to find out all about it by some means.

“ David,” said he, suddenly, “ why does thy head shine on the top in the sunlight as if it had been dipped in oil, and whence comes that odor of perfumed oil that spreads out on the air ? ”

The face of the shepherd boy flushed scarlet, and he had no answer ready for these questions. Then Doeg laughed within himself, for he felt sure that he had discovered David’s secret. He went back to the city of Bethlehem with his head full of plans for bettering his own condition through the knowledge he possessed of the affairs of King Saul, of David, and of Judge Samuel. He felt that what he knew meant riches for him if he could but be sharp enough to manage things to suit himself.

By the time Doeg got back the town was wide awake and bustling enough. Noises of all kinds were to be heard. The lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep and goats, cocks crowing, doves cooing, swallows twittering, and above all the sound of many mills and the voices of women singing. Maid-servants and sometimes, where there were no servants, the women of the household were laboriously turning the hand-mills, grinding barley-meal or fine flour for the day’s use, singing as they worked. The sheep and goats had been milked, and were taking their leisurely way back to the fields. Tame swallows flitted in and

THE GAME OF DOEG

out of the open courts. They were welcome pets, for they destroyed the flies and gnats, those pests in all warm regions. The doves came out from under the stairs in the courts where they nested, and splashed their wings in the fountains or in the water jars when there was no fountain, and pecked daintily at the grain that was thrown to them. The laborers, singly and in groups, were going back to the fields.

Doeg met Eliab, David's eldest brother, and greeted him. "How was the house of Jesse honored last night!" he exclaimed.

"It was all David last night, only David. The rest of us had no chance at all after he appeared," said Eliab. He could not help betraying his jealousy.

"Anointed with oil, too!" said Doeg.

"Hath the youngster told it already?" Eliab cried.

"He had no need to tell it. Was not his head soaked with it and the perfume of it heavy upon him? But he is a good youth and handsome. Ye ought to rejoice that the child hath found favor with the man of God. He may bring honor to the house of Jesse yet."

"That is all true, Doeg, but it shames us to feel that the little one is preferred before us, and we would keep this matter a secret as far as we may."

"Ye may count upon Doeg to spread the news no

A FRIEND AT COURT

further," replied the herdsman, with an ugly smirk, which he intended for a smile to inspire confidence.

Eliab was unsuspecting, and he told Doeg all that had happened: how the judge had made David sit close by his side, and had poured oil out of a horn upon his head, and had whispered things in his ear, which none of the rest had heard.

"Verily, this is a great honor," said Doeg, "and if the preferment had been for thee, I should have said, Hide it not; but since it hath fallen upon the little one, it may be wise, as thou sayest, to keep it a secret until we shall see what comes of it. One thing I know, the little one is growing strong and sturdy. I have just seen him crush a lion, which was devouring one of his lambs, as if the great beast had been a reptile beneath his heel. By my sacred beard, he is a lusty child."

Some of the other sons of Jesse came up in time to hear how their little brother had killed a lion that morning before it was light, and neighbors joined the group, and the story of David's bravery and strength added to that of Judge Samuel's visit to the house of Jesse, made subjects for conversation for many days thereafter in the fields and around the well in the town and even in the homes of the townspeople.

During the next few days David was alone with the flock, but his heart and soul were so full of new ideas that he could not suffer himself to be idle a

THE GAME OF DOEG

moment. He practised throwing stones with his sling, till, as his father had said of his elder brothers, he could hit the mark within a hair's breadth. He was fond of playing the harp and singing the songs he had learned from other shepherds, and he delighted to compose songs of his own. His harp always went with him wherever he was stationed. One day an accident happened to the instrument, making it useless. He was almost glad after his first grief, for he could now find employment in making a new one.

He went to work with such tools and materials as he had at hand. When the sheep rested in the shade at noon, or fed quietly in the cool of the day, he sat near them carving, shaping, experimenting, fitting the strings, and humming strains of song.

Previous to his meeting with the man of God he had made his songs about the dawn, the sunset, birds, flowers, or about his flock, but now he had a new song in his heart, and his mind was busy with it. As the harp grew under his skilful fingers, he could scarcely wait for its completion, that he might touch the chords and sing to the music the words he had composed. It was nearly night when he finished it. He laid it carefully inside his tent, while he counted the sheep and lambs, and secured them in the fold. Then, taking the new harp in his hand, he stood on a little eminence near by, and sang:



HE WAS FOND OF PLAYING THE HARP

A FRIEND AT COURT

I was small among my brothers,
I was the youngest in my father's house.
I was feeding my father's sheep.
And who hath told it to the Lord?
He is the Lord, He heareth.
His messenger came and took me,
From my father's flocks he took me,
And anointed me with oil.
My brothers were beautiful and tall,
But the Lord was not pleased with them.

“ A very pretty song, by my sacred beard,” cried a voice, breaking the stillness that followed the closing strain. “ Thou art a minstrel.”

So engrossed had David been in his song that he had been conscious of nothing else. Startled by the voice, he turned and saw Doeg's ugly face and heavy, ungainly form close by. He felt chagrin at having allowed himself to be surprised in this manner, particularly as he had woven much into his song that he would rather no one had heard.

“ So thou wast anointed,” Doeg continued good-naturedly. “ O, thou needst not blush, the whole village knows how thou wast honored. How could thy mother keep it to herself? ”

“ I am sure I am not worthy of such honor,” David said, hardly knowing how to take Doeg's bantering manner, and heartily glad he had said nothing in his song about being king.

“ Thy modesty adorns thee like a king's crown,”

THE GAME OF DOEG

said Doeg, seating himself upon a large stone and placing his bundle and staff beside him.

“ Art thou making a journey? ” David asked, seeing the bundle and deeming it wise to ignore Doeg’s remark about a king’s crown.

“ Yes, I am going back to Gibeah, my old home.”

“ That is where our king holds his court! ” exclaimed David, betraying more excitement than he realized.

Doeg did not fail to note every changing expression of the boy’s face from beneath the heavy black lashes of his long narrow eyes.

“ Yes,” he answered at length, “ I used to serve his father and him before he was king, and I have just been sent for to take charge of his flocks, to be chief shepherd.”

“ Well, thou art in luck! ” said David, looking at the man with increasing interest. “ What would I give if I might serve the king, or even see him. Is he as handsome as people say? ”

“ O yes, as men judge beauty. I suppose King Saul is the handsomest man in all the land, and as to height, he is head and shoulders above common men. His hair shames the raven’s wing for blackness, and his eyes could pierce thee through.”

“ If I might only see him! ” murmured David.

“ It may be I shall have a chance to speak with the king about thee. Come, take thy harp and speed

A FRIEND AT COURT

Doeg on his journey with a song. Surely thou hast made up a song about killing the lion by this time."

Blushing, David confessed that he had composed a song about killing the lion. He struck a few chords boldly on his new harp and sang:

Once a lion fierce entered the fold
Where lay my lambs.
Bearing one in his mouth he sought to flee,
But went not far.
I seized him, drove him with great strength
Upon the earth,
And in the Lord's name I slew him.
Thus perish all mine enemies!

"Most charming, by my beard! Yet it seemeth to me there is something lacking. Thy lion is dead enough, but why not finish the tail? Thou hadst him by it fairly enough, and didst cause his ruin thereby."

"It would not be fit poetry if I explained it all," laughed the shepherd boy.

"I know nothing about thy poetic fitness, but I should have told the tale more fully and so, according to my idea, more fitly. But thy singing is sweet, and thy words fair, as far as they go. What fashion of harp is this?"

"It is one that I made myself, O Doeg, for the one I had before was broken."

"Thou hast a cunning hand at shaping. Well, I must be gone, and I will remember thee, David, before the king, should occasion permit."

THE GAME OF DOEG

David had a feeling of distrust toward Doeg, which he could not explain, for he was no more suspicious than his brother Eliab, and yet his heart sang for joy as he watched the burly fellow going down the hill, staff in hand, for he knew of no one but Doeg who could bring him to the notice of the king. If King Saul trusted Doeg enough to make him chief shepherd of his flocks, why should not he put faith in him?

“ The Lord be with thec, Doeg,” he called heartily across the space.

CHAPTER IV

THE MINSTREL

KING Saul was ill in his palace at Gibeah, his native city. The medicines which the court physicians prescribed proved of no avail. His malady only increased. It was a curious disease, baffling in its nature. Often for several days at a time it would seem to have left him entirely, and he would be his natural self, handsome, light-hearted, full of generous impulses, and eager to promote the welfare of his subjects. In a moment a cloud would settle upon his spirit, and he would sink to the lowest depths of melancholy and despair. At such times his family and intimate friends were half afraid of him, and his servants used the utmost caution, lest they offend him in any matter, for at the slightest cause he would fly into a most violent passion and hurl anything within his reach at whoever was unfortunate enough to incur his displeasure. Sometimes his fierce and ungovernable passion seemed to stifle him, and he would fall down wherever he happened to be, choking and half suffocating in convulsions most terrible to witness.

Things were in this lamentable state when, one day,

THE GAME OF DOEG

a stranger arrived at the palace, and craved audience of the king. After some delay he was admitted to the chamber where the king sat upon a magnificent couch with some of his chief men around him. He was in a very disagreeable mood, for he had that day learned from the mouth of his messengers of losses among his flocks. Some camels and asses had been driven off by a band of robbers, a number of sheep had been destroyed by wild beasts, and others had perished for lack of water. When the stranger entered, the chief herdsman, on his knees, his forehead pressed against the marble floor and his bare toes sticking out piteously in the rear, was making the wildest excuses for his neglect and equally extravagant promises to do better in the future. As soon as the king's angry gaze alighted upon the new-comer, his brow cleared. He recognized a former trusted servant of Kish, his father. The evil face with its veiled, impenetrable expression and the glossy beard hiding the cruel mouth had not changed in the least. To the distracted king it was like the face of an angel, for in Doeg he saw the salvation of his flocks and herds.

King Saul's ruling characteristic was to act first and think afterwards, and so, as might be expected, he was constantly making mistakes and getting himself into serious difficulties. He had chosen for his servants men conspicuous for personal beauty as well as

THE MINSTREL

for size and strength. Doeg, in spite of his "sacred" beard, was far from handsome. Therefore he had been despised by Saul in the first flush of his kingship, and had been given no office. Doeg never forgot a slight, and that he had not been considered by Saul had made him vindictive. It was not out of love for his king, as he pretended, that he came to court, but in reality to see if he could devise means of bringing David and the king together. He had a malicious desire to see what would be the result of their acquaintance. He knew more about the affairs of state than any man in the kingdom aside from Judge Samuel. Having made a shrewd guess as to the reason of the visit of the man of God to the house of Jesse, he determined to amuse himself at the expense of kings and king-makers, and at the same time mayhap find some chance to satisfy his desire for revenge.

"Thou art Doeg, my father's steward," cried the king, impulsively rising from his couch and pushing aside the chief herdsman, who tumbled over and crawled hastily out of the way. "The sight of thee, Doeg, is like a lamp unto my feet. Thou art come at the right time to hold up the hands of thy king. Behold the wretched man who hath been wasting my substance! Take him away, guards, lest I pierce him through as he lies. Put him in chains, till I see what may be done with him."

THE GAME OF DOEG

The chief herdsman squirmed convulsively at this, and his bare toes twisted themselves together in a helpless way. The guards seized him and were about to bear him off, when the king commanded, "Halt, till he gives an account of his stewardship."

With many tears and violent protestations of innocence the poor man gave a stammering account of the number and situation of the various herds of sheep, goats, asses, camels, and kine, with the names of the shepherds in charge. Then he was led away.

Doeg knew more about the causes of the chief herdsman's losses than he did himself, for he had adroitly paved the way for his own entrance at court through the poor fellow's downfall, and, if the truth must be told, knew so much about the driving off of the camels and asses as to be able the next day to send after them and bring them back, much to his own honor and glory. Saul in his eagerness heaped offices upon Doeg. He made him keeper of the royal mules, steward of the house servants, and constable to his own royal person. So this odd man, not a Hebrew but an alien by birth, gained a footing in the very stronghold of the kingdom, and became the friend and adviser of the king.

Still the king's heart was heavy with burdens none knew of. He had grievously offended the judge, Samuel, whose counsel he respected much more than his conduct on certain occasions implied. Left to

THE MINSTREL

himself, he found that he knew far less about the management of a kingdom than he had supposed. The game was becoming complex, and he did not know which way to move his men. Almost in despair, he went to the priests, as was the custom in matters of importance, and asked them to inquire of God what was best to do. This they did repeatedly, but no answer came, and the miserable king felt that God had deserted him because of his sins.

Through the long nights he tossed on his bed and tried to sleep, in the hope that a cheering dream might visit him. But in vain. Under this mental strain, which his physicians knew nothing about, his condition became alarming. They held a consultation, and the chief physician came and knelt before him.

“ Well, what now ? ” the monarch asked, glowering.

“ Let my lord the king send for a man skilful in playing on the harp and in the singing of hymns, that he may drive away the king’s melancholy with music.”

“ Betake thyself to the millstones if thou art so fond of music ! ” yelled the king, savagely, making a sudden lunge after his spear, and frightening the chief physician so that he nearly tumbled over in trying to get out of the way. He made so ridiculous an appearance that the king was forced to laugh in spite of himself, but when some of the courtiers laughed too, he glowered at them, and became sullen

THE GAME OF DOEG

again. For some time there was no sound in the court save the splashing of the fountains and the fluttering and cooing of two white doves. Then, jerking out his words after the manner of a spoilt and passionate child, the king commanded,

“Search me out a man.”

At that Doeg, who happened to be present, said, “Thy servant hath seen a young man in the city of Bethlehem, a son of Jesse. He is no more than a child in age, but handsome and skilled in playing on the harp and in singing. He singeth like the wild birds, without training, and he hath great strength. Thy servant hath seen him rend a lion. He will charm away the king’s melancholy if any one can. He is a shepherd lad, and tendeth his father’s sheep.”

“Send and fetch this wonderful youth,” said the king, gloomily, fingering the great spear that always stood at his side. “According to thy story, Doeg, a king’s court would become him better than the tending of sheep.”

“Thou sayest it, my lord,” Doeg answered with an easy grace that astonished the other courtiers. Doeg was the only man among them all not afraid of the tyrant king, and he was respected by the king accordingly.

The palace had three courts and a great number of rooms. It was two stories high, and had upper and lower balconies opening on the courts. The largest

THE MINSTREL

of these courts was the king's reception room, and there most of the day he reclined on his ivory couch, surrounded by servants and courtiers. During the heat of the day a heavy awning was drawn over the opening between the roofs, where at other times the blue sky appeared. Fountains played, the marble floor was thickly covered with carpets, and at the sides low broad divans had been placed with richly embroidered pillows set up against the wall.

One afternoon, a few days after Doeg had had orders to send for the son of Jesse, two little black-eyed girls, one about twelve, the other about fourteen years old, tiptoed softly out from an inner room to one of the upper balconies, which overlooked this court. They were the king's two young daughters. They had heard that a minstrel had arrived at the palace to sing for their father, and when their nurse fell asleep, as she usually did about the middle of the afternoon, they slipped away from her, and crept out to the balcony, where they thought they might hear the music. They had discovered a small opening in a seam of the draperies that screened the balcony, through which they could look.

"Let me see!" whispered the younger girl, impatiently, after they had been taking turns a while, for the opening was so small that only one could look at a time.

THE GAME OF DOEG

“ O, thou dost want to look all the time! Hast thou fallen in love at a glance? ” returned the other.

“ Just one peep, Merab ” pursued the first. “ He will be gone! Listen! They call him David. What a sweet name! How he sings! O, I shall be jealous of thee! I shall, indeed! ”

“ Well, look then, thou silly Michal! I shall tell nurse thou art quite enamored of the minstrel boy. Then thou wilt feel ashamed.”

“ Thou art a naughty sister! ” whispered little Princess Michal, the tears rising in her soft black eyes. “ If thou tellest, we shall never have the chance of coming here again, and we shall be so lonesome with nothing to amuse us—only to embroider, embroider the cushions, all day, and I always hurt my fingers with the needle.”

“ Thou needst not cry, Michal. Thou knowest I would not tell,” said the Princess Merab, softening at sight of the tears. “ I shall tell nurse how thou hatest to sew the cushions, and we shall tease our brother Jonathan to bring the minstrel to the inner court, to sing for us. Is he there yet, Michal? ”

“ O yes, I forgot. It is thy turn. Didst thou ever see such hair, Merab, and such a fair skin? I verily believe his eyes are blue! Canst thou tell, Merab, from here if his eyes are blue? ”

“ No, but he fingers his harp like a master of music. Look again if thou wouldst see him once more, while

THE MINSTREL

I run to nurse. She is calling us, and do thou hurry and come as soon as thou hast seen the last of him."

"Merab, Merab, he is not going to sing any more. He is going out of the court with Jonathan!" cried Michal after her departing sister.

"Where is thy sister?" cried the nurse, sharply, as Princess Merab ran up behind her and clapped both hands over her eyes. "What is thy trick now? Art thou not ashamed to tease thy poor old nurse? Call thy sister and go sit by the fountain with thy sewing. Thy mother will chide me for letting thee be idle."

"Michal! Michal!" cried Merab, noisily, dancing this way and that. "I think, nurse, she has run on ahead. Get the work and come on to the fountain."

The woman meekly gathered up the embroidery materials and trudged after the Princess Merab, who was already half way down-stairs, when the Princess Michal dashed past her like a little sprite and joined her sister. Such performances went to the old lady's head and made her dizzy. She dropped down on the step for a moment to collect her senses, muttering something about "the heedless pranks of those children."

Michal put her arms around Merab's neck, and whispered in her ear, "Our father called him back, Merab, before he got to the door, and he has made

THE GAME OF DOEG

him his armor-bearer. Now he will stay here, and we may see him often."

"Hush! there is nurse with the embroidery."

"I don't want to sew, nurse! It hurts my fingers."

"But thou wilt never learn to do it and not hurt thy fingers, if thou wilt not practise. Put thy needle in so. Have a care! Do not bend it! There, it is broken!"

"Never mind, nurse," said Michal, sweetly. "Don't trouble to go up-stairs after another. It is too hot to sew to-day anyway. Let us play with the doves. Come, Merab!" And away skipped these two lively maidens, scattering the work as they went. They threw themselves down on the carpets near the fountain, each calling the names of her particular pets. Half a dozen came fluttering down to Merab, but only one to Michal. "I have only one love," she whispered in Merab's ear.

"And he is a red-headed shepherd boy," answered Merab, teasingly.

"He is my father's armor-bearer," said Michal, complacently, rolling over on her back, and letting the dove balance himself on her uplifted hands. Merab did not look quite happy, though her doves perched on her head and nestled in her arms in a very affectionate manner. "Thou dost always want the best of everything," she said after a while.

"Thou canst have Joseph now and Amos too, if

THE MINSTREL

thou carest for them. I will have no one but David any more," said Michal.

"Keep thy David, and thy Joseph, and thy Amos too! I will have no second-hand loves!" cried Merab, angrily. "There are a dozen lads I could name handsomer than any in Jonathan's guard."

Just then their mother stepped from her door upon the lower balcony, almost on a level with the court.

"Stop talking about your loves," she said, looking very much amused. "Your father will select husbands for you when you are old enough. You are too young to think of such things now. Nurse! Nurse! Why are my daughters idle? Set them to work. Come! Come!"

"As I live, O Queen, they would not sew, and Princess Michal hath broken another needle."

"What! Another? Michal, thou art a careless girl! Hast thou any more needles, nurse?"

"But two, O Queen."

"Send a maid for one. Thou needst not climb the stairs."

In a very short time the two sisters were embroidering as diligently as if they had never had another thought, and looking as demure as two young kittens. Their stately mother, in her rich jewels and flowing draperies, sat near and kept an eye on them. Strings of pearls were twisted in the heavy coils of her dark hair. She had removed her silk outer robe because

THE GAME OF DOEG

of the heat, and the soft linen gown underneath had short flowing sleeves, and crossed low on the breast, showing her arms and throat glittering with jewels.

The princesses wore long white slips cut round in the neck, with loose sleeves and little over-ropes of many colors, embroidered. All had on daintily embroidered house sandals.

While they were sitting there, Prince Jonathan came in, leading the shepherd boy David, who blushed brightly in the presence of the ladies. His tawny curls hung thick against his cheeks and throat, and he looked very handsome and sturdy in his shepherd's clothes, with his harp in his hand.

"This is my mother, and these are my sisters," Prince Jonathan explained. "Mother, this is David, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem, and he hath come to our court to divert the mind of the king from the troubles that oppress it. Our father is vastly pleased with him, and hath made him his armor-bearer, and he is to sing and play on his harp every day for him. As for me, I have said to David, 'Thou shalt be my brother.'"

"That is well, my son. He is a comely youth, and we welcome him to our court. We shall hear some of his music with pleasure, shall we not, my daughters?"

"Yes indeed, my mother," they both answered, nodding their pretty heads violently.

THE MINSTREL

So David stood up and threw his curls back, ran his fingers across the strings of his harp, and sang:

Praise waiteth for Thee, O God.
Thou visitest the earth and blessest it.
The pastures are clothed with flocks,
The valleys are covered with corn.
The little hills rejoice on every side;
They shout for joy, they also sing.

“ It is beautiful ! ” exclaimed Princess Michal.

“ I think so too,” cried Princess Merab.

“ He made his harp himself,” explained Prince Jonathan. “ Is he not skilful? ”

“ It is quite wonderful,” said the mother, smiling at David as he stood blushing again at so much praise.

“ Where didst thou learn the beautiful song? ” ventured Princess Michal.

“ It was in the summer when thy servant had taken his flocks high up into the mountains that the song came to him.”

“ Didst thou make it up thyself? ”

“ Yes, the words and the music.”

“ How couldst thou, and thou only a shepherd boy? ”

“ Because, when thy servant looked down and saw the sheep and the lambs feeding on all the little hills below, and saw the reapers in the fields in the valleys putting the grain into bundles, and the laborers in

THE GAME OF DOEG

the vineyards cutting the stems of purple grapes, his heart began to sing of itself. Many others can make songs. The people sing as they work gathering in the grain. They call to each other from hilltop to hilltop. The shepherds call to each other in song. Even the little children sing. It is not anything very wonderful to make up a song."

"O, but Jonathan hath told us what Doeg, the new steward, says, that all the shepherds declare that David, the son of Jesse, is the sweetest singer of them all," said Michal, archly.

"Doeg is very kind to bring so good a report of thy servant," said David, modestly.

Soon Prince Jonathan led David away to tell him about his new duties as armor-bearer to the king. Doeg, who was in the outer court, chuckled when he saw David meeting with so much favor.

"I am playing with kings, and it is great sport," he said to himself. "These kings are puppets in my hands, and yet," he sighed, "in after years, when Saul and David are remembered, perhaps Doeg will be forgotten. But I shall keep friendship with both. If Saul should kill David in a fit of anger, I shall still have Saul, and if Judge Samuel should overthrow this tall, handsome king of his, and succeed in putting the shepherd boy in his place, I shall still have a king on my side. In these days a man that would better his

THE MINSTREL

fortune must be ready to fall either way. I am the king's constable, and he tells me all his secrets. Judge Samuel hath forsaken him, so why should not I influence him as I please? Come, let us see what we can bring about!"

CHAPTER V

THE GAME OF DOEG

DOEG began to plot and plan and exercise his sinister influence in the counsels of King Saul, and no one dared oppose him, because the king favored him, and showered honors upon him. A messenger was sent to Jesse, David's father in Bethlehem, to inform him that the king desired to keep David at court to be his armor-bearer and to divert his mind with music.

Months passed before the boy thought much about going home. He was enchanted with the life he led in the palace. The rough edges seemed to have been taken off from everything. He could but look in wonder at the two fair daughters of the king and at their mother. His own mother and sisters often decked their persons with as many jewels as the women of the royal family, but colored glass beads are quite different from pearls and fine gold. He had been used to the sight of hands roughened and browned by toil. Here the taper fingers and the rounded arms were so smooth and fair that they seemed too beautiful for any use except to be looked at and admired.

THE GAME OF DOEG

The princesses, Merab and Michal, were so well guarded that David never caught a glimpse of either except on the rare occasions when Prince Jonathan took him to the inner court at their mother's request, to sing for them. There he always found something that frightened him more than wild beasts or a fierce storm in the mountains or an angry king. It was nothing less than the admiring glances that flashed from the dark eyes of the two little maids. He never spoke to them unless they asked him questions, and his modesty pleased both them and their mother.

Prince Jonathan, the king's eldest son, and David became fast friends. They were together on every possible occasion, and when anyone wished to express a great friendship, he said, "as Jonathan's love for David," or "as David's love for Jonathan."

Sometimes when David lay on his bed at night in the palace, he would wonder if it were not all a dream. He half expected, when he opened his eyes, to see the stars above him and the hills around, and to hear the lambs bleating in the fold. Instead, there were the rich bed-curtains, the rugs and cushions, and all the luxuries of a king's palace.

For a while the king seemed to love David very much. He sent for him every day, to come and play on his harp and sing. Saul's health improved, and as he grew better he began to busy himself with the affairs of state. He sought all through his kingdom

THE GAME OF DOEG

for able-bodied men to join his army and for men both handsome and valiant to be in his body-guard. So occupied, he forgot all about the young shepherd boy that had sung and played him back to health. Saul always forgot people when he had no more need of them. David sat by Prince Jonathan at the king's table at meals, but the king took no notice of him. It was his habit to talk with Abner, the commander-in-chief of his army, or to sit thinking. One day, when they were sitting at supper, one of King Saul's spies rushed in and fell down on his face at his feet, exclaiming: "The Philistines are gathering their armies together against us, to destroy us. They are like the sands of the sea, O king."

David's heart leaped for joy. Now, he thought, he should be able to show them that he could do something besides singing and playing the harp. Prince Jonathan had told him of his own exploits with the Philistines, and he longed to go against the enemy as Jonathan had done many times. As the king's armor-bearer he would have a chance to be in the very front of the battle, and the king and Jonathan and all the royal family would know that he was brave. Then King Saul would remember him again.

When Doeg, steward of the household slaves, keeper of the royal mules, chief of the herdsmen, and constable to the king, saw that King Saul was well again, and David was forgotten, he began to think that

THE GAME OF DOEG

with his help King Saul might do very well without Judge Samuel or the Lord. Even if Samuel had planned to make David king, and of that Doeg was not quite sure, the boy was too young yet to lead armies to battle. Would it not be better if David went back to his sheep? Doeg decided very quickly that it would be a good idea to get David out of the way before he had a chance to go into battle or show any bravery before the king, to call him back to remembrance in the royal mind. How should he accomplish this? A way presented itself at once.

The king was busy sending messengers into all parts of the land, to summon all able-bodied men that were not released by the provisions of the law from duty in the army, to come to Gibeah and join his forces for the purpose of conquering the Philistines. The crafty Doeg whispered into the ear of Abner, the captain of the king's host of warriors, and said, "The patriarch Jesse, of the city of Bethlehem, hath many stalwart sons. Choose thou some of them, O Abner."

Doeg thought that if some of the elder sons of Jesse went to the war, David would be called back home to tend the sheep. And so it happened. It was not long before a king's messenger arrived in Bethlehem, and three of David's brothers were chosen to go to war against the Philistines, among them Eliab, the eldest. The old man Jesse charged the brothers many times while they were preparing to go away, to send his

THE GAME OF DOEG

youngest son David back, if such a thing were possible.

One day Abner said to Doeg: "Three of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem are with us, and they are fine, strong men, and since thou hast the ear of the king in household matters, I pray thou wilt gain permission for the minstrel boy David, who hath in times past charmed the king with his music, to go out and see his brothers where they are in camp, for they have asked this favor."

This pleased Doeg vastly, and, pretending to be very kind and considerate, he informed David that his brothers were in the camp, and he gave him permission to go out and see them and inquire about the health of his family. Full of joy the boy hurried away, and was not long in finding his brothers among the soldiers.

"Is everything well at home, and are my father and mother comfortable?" David inquired the moment he had greeted them dutifully, as a younger brother should.

"Our father is bowed down with grief," exclaimed Eliab. "We three have been taken from him to fight in King Saul's army, and there is no one to care for the flocks. Go to the king and tell him all, and plead with him to send thee home to thy father and thy mother. Thou art the smallest in thy father's house, and he mourns for thee without ceasing."

THE GAME OF DOEG

David promised to do all that his brothers wished, and he parted from them, and went and found Prince Jonathan, and told him how matters stood. Then Jonathan went to his royal father and asked him if David might go home, since three of his older brothers were already in the field.

“David! Who is David?” inquired the king, absently.

“Why, David! The minstrel that hath diverted thee many times with his sweet music.”

“David, the minstrel! Why dost thou trouble me with such trifling matters? Bid him be gone, if he will, to his sheep-cotes again, and give thy attention to the troops. We must attend to the business of war. We have no time to play with children and hear them sing and play on toy harps.”

So David went home, though in his heart he longed to stay and take part in the coming battle. Was he not strong? Had he not killed the lion that would have carried away one of his lambs? But when he reached home, and his old father and mother clasped him in their arms, and kissed him, and wept over him, and all the household seemed so glad to welcome him back, and he saw how much his help was needed there, he could not regret having returned.

It was the middle of the harvest when he got there, and the women and children with the men that had not been drafted into the army, principally young lads

THE GAME OF DOEG

and old men, were gathering in the great purple clusters of grapes, drying quantities for raisins and treading out the rich fruit in the wine-presses.

David took his flock of sheep and lambs and went up into the high places of the mountains, where the cool breezes blew, and the pasture was fresh and green. But even there news from the battle-field where his brothers were came to him often, and eagerly he listened to thrilling stories about hand-to-hand encounters between picked men of the Philistines and Saul's army, and skirmishes between detachments of the armies, and about Prince Jonathan's brave exploits. Each soldier was obliged to furnish his own rations as far as possible, and the servants and young lads left at home had to run every few days to the camp where the army lay, to carry provisions to the soldiers. These messengers brought frequent news of how the war went and of the welfare of the sons of Jesse.

Yet David was alone most of the time, guarding his flock, with only his beloved harp for company. He was in the midst of nature's solitudes, and he saw visions and dreamed dreams, and was not afraid. In the still nights, when the stars gleamed like spikes of fire in the deep blue, cloudless sky, he would stand among his sheep and lambs and pour out his heart in song. Often the keepers of other flocks saw his sturdy, boyish figure on some mountain slope above

THE GAME OF DOEG

them, his harp in his hand and his tawny curls blown back by the wind, the sunlight flecking them with points of fire, and they could hear his sweet, clear voice giving answering songs to their own.

He never doubted the words of the man of God, that he was to be king. Somehow, some time, he knew it would come to pass, when he should have grown to mature manhood, and Saul should have died. But he kept all these thoughts deep in his heart. He practised day after day with his sling shot until he could hit the mark every time. All through the still nights he walked among his sheep and lambs and kept a sharp watch for intruders, and during the heat of the day he would sleep in some shady spot, for he knew that it was not the manner of wild beasts to prowl about after their food in the bright sunshine.

One dark night he was thinking of King Saul, of his dear friend Prince Jonathan, and of the young princesses, Michal and Merab, and all that must be going on in the king's house and in the soldiers' camp, and he walked up and down in front of the sleeping flock, and pretended that the sheep were soldiers at rest, and he was on guard. His eyes pierced every dark thicket, and his ears caught the slightest sound. Suddenly he thought he saw something move along the edge of the cliff, a big stealthy body, which crept along inch by inch, and made no sound. David's

THE GAME OF DOEG

blood leaped in his veins, and every muscle grew tense and hard. Here was an enemy, and he must show what kind of fighting man he was. No lamb should be torn from his flock this time, even though the whole army of the Philistines came upon them.

By its slow, swinging motion David knew in a moment that it was a bear, and as it came nearer and passed out of the shadow of the bushes, its shaggy coat glistened a dark brown color in the moonlight.

“She hath crept down out of the Syrian mountains in search of water and to satisfy her hunger with whatever prey she can discover,” thought the shepherd youth. He stood motionless upon a little eminence in the narrow pathway, with his heavy shepherd’s staff in his hand, and he kept saying to himself, “The Lord is my strength, the Lord is my strength.”

The creature had not scented him, because the wind was blowing towards him, and, standing without motion, he must have seemed so like an inanimate thing, a ledge of rock or a tree, that the little, sharp, roving eyes did not discover him till she was close upon him. Then, with a sudden low growl of rage, she reared upon her hind legs, to throw herself upon the enemy that confronted her. But David was too quick for her. His staff came down with crushing force upon her widely extended jaws, breaking the lower one. Again she reared herself, roaring with

THE GAME OF DOEG

pain and rage, and again David's staff descended unerringly across the bridge of her nose. Furious now, she rose again and again, blood streaming from mouth and eyes, only to feel blow after blow rain upon her head, before she could bring her powerful claws into action, or get near enough to fold her adversary in a crushing embrace. Finally she fell upon her knees as it were, stunned for an instant. David leaped upon her back, and, grasping the shaggy hair of her neck, he twisted her head around, till he heard the bones crack. The bear rolled over, and he slipped quickly out of reach of her last convulsive struggles. In a moment or two she lay still at his feet.

In the joy of his youth and strength the boy exclaimed, "So perish all mine enemies!" He looked up to the hills rising about him wrapped in shadows, with the moonlight outlining here and there a bold projection or a sturdy tree, and it seemed wonderful to him that he, a boy, alone, with only a shepherd's staff in his hand, should have killed a bear, made savage with hunger and thirst, and he felt that God had answered his prayer, and put strength into his body and courage into his heart. He looked around at the sheep, undisturbed, and the lambs softly bleating in the fold. Then, after a while, because his heart was so glad and thankful that he must sing for joy, he went to a little cleft in the rocks where

THE GAME OF DOEG

he kept his harp, and, taking it out, he stood by the bear in the soft moonlight, and sang:

I will not be afraid even in the dark night,
The Lord giveth me strength, and my staff is a strong sword in my
hand.

The Lord is my keeper, even as I am the keeper of these sheep.
Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given me unto the teeth of the lion
or unto the teeth of the bear.

As soon as it was light, David skinned the bear, and prepared the skin for curing. He intended to take it to his mother, that she might spread it over her couch. As he worked, he thought about everything that had happened to him during the past few months. He was very happy, for it seemed to him that he would some time see King Saul again, and his dear friend Prince Jonathan, and little, bright-eyed Princess Michal, who was always in his mind somehow, even when other things and people were crowding in too. Often he thought of Judge Samuel, with his vigorous, old face, framed in white curling hair and long flowing beard. He could feel the touch of the strong hands upon his head, could smell the perfume of the oil again, and could even hear Judge Samuel say: "Be righteous and obedient to His commands, and thou shalt overcome all thine enemies. Remember, God hath chosen thee to be king of thy people."

Thinking more and more about these things while he was alone with the sheep, he began to believe that

THE GAME OF DOEG

God had sent the lion and the bear to test his courage, and his heart sang for pure joy to think that he had not failed. Yes, David was very happy there in the mountains with his sheep, but he sometimes wished some traveler would pass that way, and bring him news of the war, and tell him how his brothers were faring. He would have been glad to see even the ugly face of Doeg and hear his ready gossip about affairs in the court and camp, but for many days nobody came. Most of the able men were gone to the war, and those that were left had double work in the vineyards and gardens. The people did not sing at their work so much as formerly. When they did sing, it was in a doleful strain, and they took no pleasure in answering one another from point to point as in times of peace.

David did not lack tasks to do. All through the hours of the night he must be alert and watchful. In the daytime he must lead the sheep to fresh pastures and to brooks where they might drink. Sometimes he must carry back to the fold, in his shepherd's bag or in his arms, the little lambs that were too young and weak to walk far.

One evening, when he was gathering his flock and making all safe for the night, he saw a solitary figure approaching from below. Eagerly he watched, and when the man was within hearing, he called, "Who art thou?"

THE GAME OF DOEG

“ I am Jehu, the son of Zimri,” came the answer, “ and Jesse, thy father, hath sent me to take charge of the flock. He bids thee run home as soon as it is light in the morning and take provisions to thy brothers in the camp.”

“ Come up, O Jehu,” called David, gladly, and he could not wait for Jehu to come up, but ran down the grassy slope to meet him.

It was a most unusual thing for Jesse, David's father, to hire a keeper to tend his sheep, but his three eldest sons were gone to the war, and it was necessary to send some one to them with food. David knew the way, and he was of course the one to go. Indeed, he was so eager to go that he started before sunrise, carrying his harp and the skin of the Syrian bear. Little did he think then that he should never spend another night alone with the flocks in the mountains.

When David reached his home in Bethlehem, his father and mother, glad to see him, hugged and kissed him by turns. Then they had to hear about the killing of the bear, and when Hannah, Eliab's wife, ran to the well for a pitcher of water, she proudly told the story to all the townspeople gathered there: how David, the “ little one,” had killed a Syrian bear in the mountains, and had brought the skin home to his mother.

The servants were busy preparing the provisions

THE GAME OF DOEG

David was to carry to his brothers, and when everything was ready, Jesse called his son, and said: "Take now for thy brothers these ten loaves of bread and all the parched corn thou canst carry, and take these ten little cheeses, which Hannah hath made out of milk, as a gift unto the captain of their thousand, and run to the camp where thy brothers are. Look how they fare, see if they be firm and strong of body as when they went away, and if their eyes are bright and their color good. And take their pledge, my son. Bring to thy father a lock of the hair of each, that I may know my sons are alive and well. And bring me news of the war, and find out if there be any hope that it will soon be over. The Lord be with thee, David, and bring thee safe home again, for thou art the youngest son of thy father and mother and the delight of our hearts in our old age."

David loaded himself with all the parched corn and bread and cheese he could carry, and over his shoulder, on top of the load, he slung his harp. He could not think of going without that. Then he kissed his father and mother good-by, and bade all the household farewell, and started on his journey.

Many people of the town greeted the handsome youth as he passed them, and many wanted to hear more about his fight with the bear. Some wished to send messages to their loved ones in the army or ask David to bring back pledges of their safety. Old

THE GAME OF DOEG

eyes looked after the youth with tears in them, and young eyes smiled at him until he was gone out of sight, beyond the gates of the town, down the terraced slope and away.

CHAPTER VI

A CHAMPION



AS he approached the camp, he saw the troops drawn up in battle array, and his heart beat fast, for he felt sure they were about to attack the enemy. He left the food he had brought with those in charge of the provisions in the rear of the camp, and ran on to find his brothers, up to the summit of the hill where the army stood. The hill sloped abruptly to a narrow valley, and directly opposite, on a similar hill, stood the army of the Philistines, also drawn up in battle array.

He discovered his brothers near the front. While he stood talking with them, he heard a loud shout, which seemed to come from the very depths of the earth, "Give me a man of you that will fight with me!"

He looked down, and there, striding through the middle of the valley, was a man of gigantic stature, seeming to the vision of the astonished shepherd boy as tall as two men and proportionately bulky. A great brass helmet covered his head, and a coat of mail protected his huge body. His legs were encased in greaves of brass, and a target of brass was fastened between his shoulders at the back. A spear,

THE GAME OF DOEG

so heavy that no man but himself could wield it, rested across his shoulder. David ran forward in youthful eagerness. "Who is this giant?" he asked of one of the soldiers near him.

"Hast thou not heard of Goliath of Gath?" returned the soldier. "He is the champion of the Philistines. Every morning and evening he comes out and defies the army of King Saul, and challenges us to send out a man to fight him. But we have no champion to send against him."

At this moment the giant's voice thundered again from the mouth of his brass helmet: "Men of Israel, why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Choose ye a man and let him come down to me. Give me a man that we may fight together. If he be able to kill me, then we will be your servants and serve you; but if I kill him, ye shall be our servants and serve us."

David's wrath was aroused. He seemed to see the lion springing at his throat again. "What!" he exclaimed, "shall this heathen defy the armies of our king? I will go forth to meet him."

"That thou shalt not!" cried Eliab. "Thou wilt go back to thy father and to thy flocks. Why camest thou down hither? With whom hast thou left those few poor sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thy heart. Thou art come down to see the battle."

A CHAMPION

David felt ashamed for a moment, smarting under the rebuke, but the voice of the giant, again taunting the army with having no man fit to send against him, rang in his ears like a personal challenge. He turned from Eliab, and began to talk with other soldiers.

“What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine giant?” he questioned. “I have been tending my father’s flocks in the mountains, and we have had no news of the war for many days in my town.”

“Why, the king will do great things for the man that killeth Goliath. He will heap great riches upon him, and will give him his daughter in marriage, and will make his father’s house free in Israel.”

“Tell the king that David, the son of Jesse, will accept the challenge, and will go out to meet this Philistine. Who is he that he should stand there in the valley hurling defiance at the armies of my lord the king?”

“Give me a man to fight with me,” bellowed the Philistine giant. “Ye dogs of Hebrews, have ye no man among you?”

The soldiers were gathering around David as he stood, his reddish curls blowing back in the wind, his shepherd’s bag, in which he had carried some of the provisions for his brothers, hung over his shoulder. The three of them had managed to keep near him, and now Eliab clutched him by the shoulder, exclaim-

THE GAME OF DOEG

ing: "He is a mere stripling, a naughty child. How should he fight this Philistine?"

"To the king with the youth!" shouted some of the soldiers. "We have a champion."

"He is the youngest son of Jesse, our father," pleaded Eliab, now thoroughly alarmed, "and should any harm come to him, I and my brothers will be held responsible."

"To the king with him! To the king with him!" cried the soldiers, almost carrying David along. Some of them ran on ahead shouting, "A champion! David! David, the son of Jesse!"

The news that a champion had offered himself traveled fast, and before they reached the camp messengers came running to meet them, bidding them bring David before King Saul at once. In a few moments the shepherd youth found himself ushered into the royal presence without ceremony of any kind.

King Saul was nearly a giant himself, being almost seven feet in height. He looked with considerable curiosity at David as he ran up, and he did not know him. Nearly a year had passed since the boy had gone back to his sheep in the mountains, and in that time his beard had begun to grow. He was not a boy any longer, but a well-grown youth. Neither did the king remember David's name. He had been a very sick man when David played and sang for him,

A CHAMPION

and he had not fixed the happenings of those days firmly in his mind.

David exclaimed impetuously: "O king, let not thy heart fail because of this giant of Gath. Thy servant will go down and fight with him and kill him."

King Saul smiled grimly. "My son, thou art but a youth," he said. "Thy beard is scarcely grown."

"Thy servant is very strong and very quick," pleaded David, trying to make his muscular young body look as tall as possible.

The king shook his head despondently. "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine, to fight with him," he said, "for thou art but a youth, and he is a man of war from his youth."

David answered back so boldly that those gathered around could not help but take courage: "Thy servant was keeping his father's sheep in the mountains near Bethlehem, and once there came a lion out of his den in the caves of the rocks, and took a lamb from the fold. And thy servant smote the lion and slew him, and seized him by his beard, and twisted his neck and broke it, and delivered the lamb alive out of his jaws. With my hands alone I slew the lion. O king, thy servant had no weapon."

The soldiers began to nod their heads approvingly and whisper to each other: "This David is a sturdy youth."—"See how well-knit he is."—"If his

THE GAME OF DOEG

strength is equal to his courage, we could not ask for a better champion."

And David told the king still more about his exploits, not in a boasting manner, but as if beseeching the privilege of fighting with the Philistine: "And not many days ago there came a bear creeping stealthily along in the shadow of the rocks, trying to enter the fold where lay my lambs, and thy servant went out after the bear, and when he rose against me, I slew him, as I did the lion. O king, thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this Goliath shall be as one of them. Let no man's heart fail because of this giant."

Still King Saul hesitated. It seemed so impossible a thing that a mere boy could go out against a mighty man of war and actually kill him. Would it not make the tribes of people round about them laugh and deride the Hebrews, if they should send out a child to fight their battles?

Doeg, who had been here and there all the time ordering the king's household, was very well aware of all that was taking place. He was not well pleased to see David back again. He would rather have had him remain in the hills of Bethlehem tending his father's sheep. He saw that the boy had great strength of character as well as bodily strength and courage, and might very easily win the favor of King Saul. Perhaps Saul would make David keeper of his

A CHAMPION

house and of his flocks and herds, and Doeg would fall from the high position he held in the kingdom. Doeg was very well off, thanks to his own cunning, and he did not want to be supplanted by a shepherd boy, even though the boy had been honored by Judge Samuel. He thought it would be to his own interest to advise King Saul to permit David to go against the giant. He would surely be killed and out of the way. So he whispered into the king's ear:

"My lord, O king, this youth speaks the truth. I myself, with these eyes, saw him kill the lion, and I doubt not that he killed the bear also. Let him go out against this Philistine. If he kill him, it will be well for thee and thy kingdom, and if he be slain, what matters it? He is only a shepherd boy."

"I believe thou art right, Doeg," replied the king, and, turning to David, he said: "Thou art but a youth. Art thou not afraid to go out against this Philistine?"

"The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of this giant."

"Go, then, and the Lord be with thee."

The soldiers began to cheer and to shout David's name. The Philistine army on the brow of the opposite hill wondered what the noise in the Hebrew camp was about, and if they had found a champion at last. The giant Goliath strode up and down the

THE GAME OF DOEG

valley between the armies, clanking his brazen armor, brandishing his huge sword, and bellowing from time to time at the top of his voice, "Choose ye a man and let him come down to me."

"Put on my armor," said King Saul to David, "and take my sword in thy hand."

Now all was eager excitement in the Hebrew camp. King Saul fitted the helmet on David's head with his own hands, adjusted the corselet and the other parts of the armor, and put his own sword in his hand.

Eliab and the other two brothers of David managed to push their way through the crowding soldiers, and they saw their youngest brother trying to walk about in his suit of mail. Not daring to petition the king, they made one more effort to save him from what they thought would be certain death, by raising a laugh at his awkward appearance, in the hope that the king would see the utter uselessness of sending him against the giant.

"He hath never worn armor," said the soldiers, half in pity. "He will be like a worm in Goliath's path," and their hearts began to fail again.

"O king, I cannot go with these," David exclaimed at length. "I pray thee, give me leave to go in my own way."

"Put them off and go as thou wilt," said the king.

His brothers looked on helplessly, while David put off the king's splendid armor, and hung his shepherd's

A CHAMPION

bag around his neck again. It must have seemed a joke to the grim men of war, to see him go to a little brook close by and take from it five smooth stones, which he put into the bag after taking out his sling. Armed only with these and his staff, he advanced down the slope to meet the giant. King Saul watched him as he went, and inquired of the captain of his army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?"

"As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell," Abner replied.

"Inquire thou whose son the stripling is," said the king.

The great clumsy giant stood stock still, in surprise, at sight of the red-cheeked youth coming toward him. When the idea had penetrated his thick intelligence, that this boy had really come to fight him, he was greatly incensed.

"Dost thou take me for a dog and not a man, that thou comest to me with sticks and stones?" he bellowed.

"No, not for a dog, but for a creature worse than a dog," replied David, unabashed, and the hearts of the Hebrew soldiers pulsed with hope once more.

"Come to me, thou stripling, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field," thundered the giant, almost beside himself with rage.

"Thou comest to me with a sword and with a

THE GAME OF DOEG

spear and with a shield, but the God of the Hebrews is my armor. It is better than thine. This day I will smite thee, and cut off thy head, and give thy body to the dogs. This day, O Goliath, the Lord will deliver thee into my hand, and I will smite thee, and take thy head from thee."

David spoke with so much assurance that King Saul's whole army began to take courage, and the Philistines to feel a trifle uneasy about the result of the contest; but Goliath, who was rather stupid, as giants are apt to be, had no doubt but that he should kill the boy. He started to run toward David, but his armor was too ponderous even for his vast bulk, and he could scarcely increase his speed from the leisurely stride which had so impressed King Saul's men. He pretended to feel such disdain for this champion of the Hebrews that he would take his time, and, indeed, there would have been no doubt of his killing him, had David come within reach of the heavy spear.

Saul's troops began to jeer at Goliath as he continued to stride up and down ponderously. The forehead of the giant, framed in the helmet, left a small part between the eyes exposed, forming an excellent target for a youth who could sling stones straight enough to hit the mark within a hair's breadth.

David took a stone out of his bag, and fitted it in the sling as he ran to meet his lumbering foe. The

A CHAMPION

watching soldiers on either side saw the sling whirl over David's head, and they saw the stone shoot straight from the sling, glide through the air, and strike the giant full in the forehead. An instant later he reeled and fell forward upon his face.

A great shout of triumph burst from the army of the Hebrews, and mingled with it came gasping cries and howls of dismay from the Philistines. Then all was still again. David was running swiftly toward the fallen champion, his eyes shining, his cheeks glowing red, and his hair flying. Arrived at the prostrate form, he leaped upon it, stood upright an instant, then stooped, and drew the giant's huge sword out of its sheath at his side. Not a sound was heard from the opposing armies while he lifted the sword, and cut off the head of Goliath of Gath, and held it up in one hand.

Then shout after shout rent the air from the Hebrew side. Seeing their champion dead, the Philistines became panic-stricken, and fled in the greatest disorder, the Hebrew host close upon their heels, shouting their victory. It was a complete rout, and many of the Philistines were killed. All the stores in their camps were taken by the Hebrew soldiers, and brought across the valley, where the huge body of Goliath still lay, to King Saul in the Hebrew camp. Everybody was talking about David and his wonderful skill and courage, and King Saul, in spite of

THE GAME OF DOEG

the fact that David had done him such great service, began to feel jealous. He asked Abner again to find out whose son David was.

“ There he cometh now,” Abner said. “ He hath girt on the sword of Goliath, and hath the head in his hands, and lo! Prince Jonathan is with him, and other men follow with the brazen armor of the Philistine.”

“ Go and meet him, and bring him to me.”

So Abner went and brought David to the king, and David laid the head of Goliath on the grass at the king's feet. It rolled over so that its ghastly, sunken eyes looked up at him. Fighting men in those days were not startled by such sights, and Saul looked at the face of his enemy with grim satisfaction.

“ The lad hath spoilt his beauty, by my beard! ” said the gruff voice of Doeg, as its owner shouldered his way to the front.

“ To my eye he had far less beauty than size to boast of,” said the king.

“ The stone is set like a jewel in his crown,” Doeg observed.

“ It was skilfully done,” the king answered, and, turning to the blushing David, he asked, “ Whose son art thou, young man? ”

“ I am the son of Jesse of Bethlehem,” replied David, “ even thy servant David, who did sing and

A CHAMPION

play on the harp before thee in times past, and divert thy mind."

"What! The minstrel?" King Saul passed his hand across his forehead in a puzzled fashion. "Now I do remember thee, but thy beard is growing, and thy face is changed somewhat from the roundness of childhood. Besides I should have supposed thy hands fitted to hold the harp and play upon it, not for the wielding of weapons of war. We will keep thee now in our household, David, to sing to us in time of peace and to fight with us and for us in time of war."

The king ceased to speak, and Prince Jonathan, his son, who had stood by his side, threw his arms around David's neck and kissed him, exclaiming, "I loved thee as a minstrel boy, and even then I called thee brother. Now we shall make a covenant together, and thou shalt be my brother in real fact. My father, grant me permission to take David to my own tent."

"I see thou lovest the youth, Jonathan. Take him and do what thou wilt for him."

The two young men went away, with their arms about each other, to Prince Jonathan's tent. Here the young prince stripped off the robe he wore and made David put it on, and he gave him his bow and his sword and the girdle that held his sword at his side. It was considered a great honor to receive any part of the dress that had been worn by a king or by

THE GAME OF DOEG

his eldest son. When the king's household and the soldiers heard how David had been honored, they began to treat him with the greatest respect. Indeed, they were all spellbound with admiration for this young, handsome warrior.

King Saul was a proud, passionate, vindictive man. He knew that he had not obeyed Judge Samuel in the government of the kingdom, and Samuel's words at their last meeting were always ringing in his ears: "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than thou." Now the Hebrews had won a great victory, but whose victory was it, Saul's or David's? The remembrance of all that he had promised to the man that should go down and kill Goliath of Gath angered him. Why had he ever promised so much? Riches, his daughter in marriage, and that his father's house should be free in Israel! All this he had promised. Would the youth David claim all these things? If he did, was it necessary that he should grant them, even if he had made such an offer when his kingdom was threatened by the enemy?

He thought of consulting Abner, the captain of his host, but Abner was an honest, straightforward man. He would not consider it right that the king should not keep his promise, even though he might not say so.

A CHAMPION

That night King Saul was nervous and sleepless, lying in his tent in the middle of the camp, with the soldiers sleeping in a wide circle around him, and all the stuff they had taken from the Philistines packed and ready to load upon the camels in the morning, when they would begin their triumphal march home from the war.

David had not thought of claiming any reward for his brave act, and yet, as he slept under the open sky by the side of Prince Jonathan, he dreamed of Princess Michal, the king's younger daughter.

CHAPTER VII

A JEALOUS KING

IN the early morning the army got into motion. Having been victorious, all the soldiers stood erect and marched proudly. In the front rank was King Saul, tall and handsome, from his shoulders and upward taller than all the rest. At his right hand marched the young champion, David, with Prince Jonathan, and at his left stout Abner, captain of the host. Doeg led the long line of camels, gaily caparisoned and loaded with the baggage. Altogether the array was imposing enough to inspire the hearts of the populace along the line of march with wildest enthusiasm.

News of the killing of Goliath and of the subsequent victory had spread to all the towns along the route, with glowing accounts of David's beauty and youthfulness. His fair complexion and his auburn hair were easy to describe and easy to recognize. As the army passed town after town, bands of women and children, according to custom, came out to honor the returning warriors. They formed triumphal processions, singing and dancing and playing upon instruments. Many of the young girls and children wore

A JEALOUS KING

garlands of flowers. It was most gratifying to the soldiers to be so honored.

The greatest interest centered upon David. Everyone wanted to see David, the shepherd boy, who had slain the terrible champion of the Philistines, Goliath of Gath. King Saul began to feel jealous from the first, because more attention and praise were given to David than to himself, and when the women began to sing, "King Saul hath slain his thousands, and David hath slain his ten thousands," he eyed David with secret and malignant hatred. Even at the gate of the royal city Gibeah the same song burst from the lips of the women, "King Saul hath slain his thousands, and David hath slain his ten thousands."

"What more can he have, but the kingdom?" thought King Saul, and the great victory they celebrated turned to bitterness in his heart. He was not generous enough to share honors with anyone, and he was suspicious and sensitive.

They entered the city gate. The open spaces, the narrow streets, and even the roofs of the houses swarmed with women and children, old people and servants, all those who had remained within the city during the absence of the army. All were in gayest holiday attire, and in the midst of them marched the victorious army. The bands of women winding in and out everywhere sang again and again, and

THE GAME OF DOEG

answered one another in song, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

King Saul began to look exceedingly displeased. His eyes glared wildly, and the hand that held his spear shook as if palsied. He called Doeg, and said to him, "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands, and what can he have more, but the kingdom?"

"O king, the women are smitten with his beauty," snarled Doeg, and King Saul eyed David again with hatred and suspicion.

All that day and most of the night were given up to singing and dancing and feasting in celebration of the great victory over the Philistines. David's name was on every lip, and he was openly praised, no matter which way he turned. Even the king's daughters, Merab and Michal, with their attending maidens, cast sly, admiring glances at the youth, and sang, "David hath slain his ten thousands." It was bitterness to the king, who had always wanted all the praise for himself, and who had reason to feel that his position as king was not so secure as he might have wished it to be.

The next day King Saul sat in the inner court of his house, and refused audience to all. It was whispered about that he had been seized with an attack of his former distressing illness, such as he had had when David played for him on the harp and sang to

A JEALOUS KING

him. David heard about the king's distress of spirit, and, having no suspicion that he himself was the cause, he took his harp and went to the court to divert the royal mind as he had done in times past. He slipped in quietly, and stood by the wall opposite the king, who lay half reclining upon an ivory couch, with a javelin in his right hand. A frenzied, evil look sat upon his face.

The instant King Saul saw David, the thought came to him, "I will smite him even to the wall with this javelin." Almost swifter than thought the weapon sped from the royal hand. But it did not pin David to the wall as was intended, for with a quick motion the youth avoided its deadly stroke, and it fell harmless. Still unsuspecting of the king's real intention, and hoping to calm him and bring him into a happier mood, David began to play again the sweetest music he knew.

King Saul's hand was unerring in the hurling of the javelin, and he could not understand how he had missed. He grew more frenzied at having failed in his intention, and, seizing another javelin, he tried once more to fix the minstrel to the wall with it, but again he missed, and now, thoroughly alarmed, David hurried out of the court. The king lay for some time staring at the wall where the object of his jealous hatred had stood, and then he whispered, his athletic

THE GAME OF DOEG

frame shaken with fright, "The Lord is with David, and hath departed from me."

David went straight to Prince Jonathan and told him all that had occurred, and, alarmed for his friend, Jonathan would not let him play before the king, his father, again, but kept him with him as much as possible.

A day or two later King Saul sent for Doeg, and said to him, "How is our champion David behaving?"

"David behaveth himself wisely in all his ways, and all the people love him because he goeth out and in among them and flattereth them. He is a discreet youth, and attendeth well to his own interests. Thy servant knoweth somewhat of him. I pray thee, bid Abner and thy son Jonathan eye him watchfully."

"Send Abner to me. I will confer with him about the lad."

Doeg turned to go, but he hesitated, as if he still had something on his mind.

"Speak, if thou hast something more to say," the king exclaimed, irritated because Doeg had not gone at once to summon Abner.

The king's constable put on an inscrutable look. "Who hath the king's interests more at heart than thy servant Doeg?" he asked.

"I command thee to speak out!" cried King Saul, getting more and more angry, and shivering, as he

A JEALOUS KING

often did when Doeg stood near him, simply because the latter was so ugly of feature that the king could not bear to look at him.

“ Well, then, my lord king, the people are murmuring because King Saul hath not fulfilled his promises to their mighty champion David, to make him rich and give him his daughter in marriage and to make his father’s house free in Israel.”

A frenzied look leapt into the king’s eyes, and his handsome face took on an expression not pleasant to look at.

“ The people! ” he exclaimed. “ Shall I divide this kingdom of Israel with a shepherd lad to please the people? ”

“ Far be it from thy servant to advise the king in so weighty a matter,” Doeg returned smoothly, “ and yet the people are to be taken account of. They know that David hath just returned from laying the great sword of Goliath of Gath up before the Lord in Nob, the city of the priests.”

“ What is the least that I can do? ” questioned the king, abruptly.

“ If my lord the king will permit his servant to speak freely, this would I do: I would send this David away from the court, where he holds under his spell all the principal persons, including the king’s son and even his daughters, and I would make him captain over a thousand men. This will seem to be a

THE GAME OF DOEG

great honor in the eyes of the people, and—it will be a post of danger, O king. He is very young to marry. Let the people forget this part of the king's promise for a time, and perhaps there may be no occasion to fulfil it."

Doeg spoke softly and soothingly in the king's ear. The royal anger diminished, and a gratified smile took its place.

"Thou art the keeper of my house, Doeg," declared King Saul. "Now bid Abner come to me."

Doeg went out, chuckling behind his glossy black beard, and thinking to himself: "O King Saul, I will yet make thee and David play at snaring each other. By my sacred beard, this is a better game of kings than most men can play. So thou wilt shiver, O king, because a man of ugly countenance standeth near to thee? We will make David's beauty cause thee to shiver even more."

When the faithful Abner came, King Saul spoke impetuously and as if moved by the most honorable motives in the world: "Abner, thou art captain of my host, and worthy of the honor the office confers. What shall we do for this favorite of the people, young David, the son of Jesse, who killed the Philistine giant? Would it meet with thy approval to make him captain over a thousand men?"

"It would strengthen the power of my lord the king over his enemies, and would suitably honor the

A JEALOUS KING

young man for his bravery," replied Abner, who took a very practical view of everything, and never looked for unworthy motives in anyone, least of all his king.

"See thou to it," said the king, and Abner went out to find David and tell him the good news, that he was made captain over a thousand men in the king's army.

The Philistines were so badly beaten that they did not gather strength enough for another war for some time. David and his men made occasional raids into the enemy's country with comparatively little danger. His office gave him a still stronger hold upon the affections of the people, and the spies of King Saul brought him daily news of the increasing popularity of the young captain. Again the monarch took counsel with his constable Doeg: "This young man's popularity must not increase. What shall I do?"

"Let my lord the king tempt the young man to greater efforts, to give additional proofs of his valor," advised Doeg. "Give him an object to be gained, and then he will go out and provoke our enemies, the Philistines, to a battle, and, being at the front as captain, he will surely be killed; for they seek to avenge themselves for the killing of their champion Goliath."

This seemed so easy a solution of the problem that the king wondered he had not thought of it himself.

THE GAME OF DOEG

“With what thing shall we tempt him, Doeg?” he asked, very much pleased.

“Let the king’s daughter tempt him,” Doeg suggested.

“That is a very good idea,” exclaimed the king. “Send Captain David to me, and send also my elder daughter, the Princess Merab.”

Doeg carried the messages promptly, and very soon Princess Merab stood blushing at the king’s right hand, and David stood equally embarrassed at his left. It was the first time King Saul had seen David since he had tried to pin him to the wall with his javelin. Now he looked smiling and handsome, and David was much too young and inexperienced in reading the characters of men to detect the base motive behind the smiles. The king made no reference to the unpleasant affair of the javelins. Smilingly he said: “Thy king greeteth thee, David. Behold my elder daughter, Princess Merab, her will I give to thee for thy wife. Only be thou valiant for me and fight the Lord’s battles.”

“Who am I? and what have I done, and what is my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?” David stammered.

“It is my will and a just reward for thy bravery,” said the king.

It was soon known everywhere that David and the king’s elder daughter, Princess Merab, were to be

A JEALOUS KING

married, and wherever the young man went, the people shouted, "Hail to the king's son-in-law that is to be!"

But there were no battles, and nothing happened to put David's life in danger. Indeed, the young man did not seem to seek to do any brave act that could be told in praise of him to the king or to his promised bride. King Saul grew more and more restless and melancholy, with occasional fits of anger, while the preparations for the wedding went on in the royal household. A few days before the time set for the wedding, he sent for Doeg, and when the constable arrived in his presence, he found the monarch in a rage terrible to witness.

"What kind of evil advice didst thou give me?" King Saul demanded. "Didst thou not promise me that David should go forth in the forefront of the battle, and should fall beneath the hand of the Philistines? If he showeth no spirit now, will he do any better when he is the king's son-in-law?"

By stealthily creeping about behind draperies and listening to private conversations between King Saul's young daughters and by adroit questioning of their nurse, Doeg had verified what he had for some time suspected, that the Princess Michal, the king's younger daughter, loved David, and that David loved her. He had also found out that Princess Merab was wildly in love with a young man named

THE GAME OF DOEG

Adriel, a member of the king's guard. He explained all this to the king, and the fickle monarch began to laugh and clap his hands.

"Thou art the first bearer of such news, Doeg. Mind not thy king's hasty temper. Thou knowest my mind is troubled over many things. It is well thou hast told me this, and it doth not displease me, for between thee and me, Doeg, we may be able to make this maid a sure snare unto him. I will send him into further dangers, that he may win her, where his life may be taken in battle, without my hand upon him. Let the hand of the Philistines be upon him, O Doeg."

"Even so, my king."

"And that the elder daughter may be first married, according to our custom, send for this Adriel and put the wedding garments upon him, and we will celebrate the marriage this night between him and my daughter, Princess Merab. But say nothing to anyone. Simply bring Adriel instead of David as the bridegroom."

CHAPTER VIII

A BROKEN PLEDGE

FULL of his new project, King Saul called Abner, the captain of his host, and told him to send David with some of his thousand men out into the Philistines' country as scouts, to find out if there were any signs of the enemy's getting together again for war, and what parts of the land were least protected.

As soon as he received the command, David began to pick out his men, four in all, and make his preparations. Prince Jonathan insisted upon going with him, and the company of six, dressed as shepherds hunting for lost cattle, were soon on the march.

When King Saul learned that his son Jonathan had gone too, he flew into a passion, but he recovered his cheerfulness as soon as he thought of the game he was about to play with David.

The third day from the time the detachment started to spy out the enemy's country was the one set as the wedding day of Captain David and the king's eldest daughter, Princess Merab.

"It seems strange," said Prince Jonathan, "that the king, my father, should have sent thee out into the

THE GAME OF DOEG

land of the Philistines on this expedition, when the third day from now is thy wedding day. Perhaps he forgot. He hath had some returns of his old malady, as thou knowest, and when he is sick, he gets things all wrong and confused. But we shall return in good time, David. Nothing could make me happier than to see thee married to my sister."

"Truly, Jonathan, I am not great enough or rich enough or wise enough to become the king's son-in-law," said David, "but I will obey the king's command and spy out this land."

"We can spy out a good portion in two days," returned Jonathan, "and I, thy brother, will be responsible for bringing thee home for thy wedding day. Here are six of us. We will divide up in pairs, and go in three different directions. Each two shall travel for a day, and then take a day for the return, so that near sunset of the second day we may meet again on this spot where the Philistine's land borders our land. Then we will go back with all our information and discoveries to my father. We will spy out the land so well that my father can no longer doubt thy faith on any point."

"Thou art a good brother, Jonathan," said David. "Sometimes I think that, were it not for thee and thy love, I should ask the king to send me back again to my sheep in Bethlehem, and to my old father and mother, who mourn for me, because I am their young-

A BROKEN PLEDGE

est son and I am away from their sight. Since I came to take my brothers' pledges and bring them food to eat, I have not returned. Now my brothers are gone back again to till their land, but my parents look for me, and I do not come."

"But they will be proud to have thee the king's son-in-law, and my father, when he understands thy good heart, will not fail to shower honors and riches upon thee."

David laughed happily. He was young and full of hope. Prince Jonathan was not much older, and they made a glorious holiday of spying out the Philistines' land. Each two men traveled for a day, slept where they could, and then traveled back for a day, so that at sunset of the second day they arrived once more at the place from which they had started. Each party had had adventures and narrow escapes from discovery, and they had plenty to talk about as they went back together toward the royal city. By the time they neared the gates, they had formed plans for a raid upon certain points in the rich country of the Philistines.

"What is the sound of rejoicing that I hear?" exclaimed Prince Jonathan as they came closer to the city.

"I hear music, I hear the sound of tabrets and harps and cymbals," cried David.

"Let the flectest of you run ahead and find out

THE GAME OF DOEG

the cause of this rejoicing," Prince Jonathan commanded.

So the fleetest man ran ahead, and before the others reached the gates, he came running back again.

"It is a marriage," he announced, "and lo! I saw the bridegroom, and he is our friend Adriel, one of King Saul's guards, whom we know, and he was leading by the hand the Princess Merab, the king's elder daughter."

"Thou art wrong," Prince Jonathan declared angrily, "this thing cannot be."

"I saw Adriel's face, O prince, by the light of the wedding lamps that the people carried in the procession."

"But to-morrow my sister is to be married with fitting ceremony to our captain, David, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem."

"But hear ye not the people shouting?"

They were at the gate now, and they heard plainly the shouts of the people: "Hail to the bridegroom and to the bride! Hail to Adriel, the king's guard, and to Princess Merab, the king's elder daughter."

They could not get near the wedding party, but they saw that the procession was going in the direction of Adriel's house, where they knew the wedding feast must be spread. It was plain that the fickle monarch had broken his pledge to David. Prince Jonathan felt so mortified at the action of his royal

A BROKEN PLEDGE

father that he hung his head, and grew red with shame, feeling that David had every right to be angry at being treated with such indignity.

But David began to laugh, and would not take the matter seriously. "Why art thou so cast down in thy looks, my brother Jonathan?" he asked. "Hath not the king a right to be of one will to-day and of another to-morrow? Who am I, to be the king's son-in-law? Let me serve the king in any way that he wills. Let me provoke no anger and raise no quarrel."

"My father is afflicted with a disease of the mind that causes him to imagine things about people that are not true," excused Prince Jonathan, for he loved his father. "Thou wilt not lay this thing up against him, David."

"I will lay up nothing against the king," David promised.

"Sometimes I fear that the influence of Doeg, the steward of our household, is not good for my father, and yet he is the only one that hath the ear of my father at all times," Jonathan went on. "Even Abner hesitates to speak out his mind or to advise, but this Doeg is never backward about it. But he is an Edomite, not an Israelite, and it seemeth not good to me to trust all the secrets of the government to one not of our people."

"I have sometimes felt distrustful of Doeg, and

THE GAME OF DOEG

yet I know not that he hath anything against me," said David, musingly, and after a moment he added, "and it was he who first brought me to the notice of King Saul, because he knew that I had a little skill with the harp and in singing."

"And thou didst please my father for a time," said Prince Jonathan, leaving the discussion of Doeg for the more intimate affairs of David, "but he tires of things quickly, and he is easily made jealous. He was in a desperate state when first thou camest to him, and that he should cast the javelins at thee, and should promise thee my sister in marriage, and not fulfil his pledge, seem to me signs of the return of the disease of mind he had then, rather than of a wicked heart. Have patience with my father, David, for my sake."

"I had not thought of anything else but serving him the best I can," David replied. "But since thou lovest me, Jonathan, I will confide to thee a secret that lieth very deep in my heart. It is thy younger sister, Princess Michal, that I love, and I have reason to think that she loveth me."

"O my brother," Prince Jonathan exclaimed gladly, "then things will surely come about all right. My father will surely give thee Michal, my younger sister."

"Perhaps it may be so," returned David, his hand-

A BROKEN PLEDGE

some face all aglow with hope. "I will perform any service for her sake."

"Let us say nothing until the wedding feast is over," advised Prince Jonathan, "and then I will approach my father for thee. But we should speak softly of these matters, for we know not who may be listening. Our steward and keeper of the royal mind maketh it his duty to be everywhere at all times."

As Prince Jonathan finished speaking, a dark figure glided away from behind the two young men, and mingled with the crowd. It was Doeg.

The marriage feast continued for seven nights according to custom, but David and Prince Jonathan kept their secret together. Doeg, having heard from David's own lips that he was ready to perform any service for the Princess Michal's sake, told it to the king, who had been feeling wretched and melancholy because the young captain had shown no resentment of the way he had been treated. The news pleased King Saul.

"I will make the maiden a snare unto him," he declared. "Go thou to David and say, 'Thou shalt surely be the king's son-in-law.' Commune with him secretly, O Doeg, and say, 'Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee, and the king desires thee to be his son-in-law.'"

"What service shall I require of him, O king? Fear not to make it as heavy as thou wilt, so that he

THE GAME OF DOEG

may fall this time by the hand of the Philistines, as thou desirest."

"Yes, O Doeg, the hand of the Philistines shall be against him, and not my hand. This shalt thou say to David: 'The king desireth not any dowry, but that thou shalt kill an hundred Philistines, and bring him a sure pledge of the number.' Send him this message, and delay not."

As Doeg went out with his ugly smile only half hidden in his black, curly beard, the king's eyes followed him with loathing in them. "Why do I not kill thee," he thought, "and be rid of the evil counsels thou art constantly putting into my head, instead of desiring to kill this handsome youth, who overcame the Philistine giant, and constantly shows me his faith and devotion, no matter which way I turn my hand toward him? Jonathan loveth him, and the people love him. Why not I?"

Then the small, sharp voice of jealousy spoke somewhere in the king's brain: "Hath not Doeg told thee that Judge Samuel intendeth to make this David king in thy place? Because Samuel hath cast thee off and refuseth to speak to the Lord for thee, wilt thou give thyself to the usurper? Arouse thee! Let no David stand in thy way!" King Saul failed to remember that it was his own headstrong pride that had caused Judge Samuel to turn away from him, and he pitied himself, as an over-indulgent father

A BROKEN PLEDGE

pities a spoilt child. He always tried to think of things to please himself in every way possible and to draw all the praise to himself. The people were beginning to notice this and to be displeased with it.

Doeg went out to the camp where David was with his thousand fighting men, explaining to them the general lay of the land in the Philistines' country, in which he and Prince Jonathan and the four picked men had been on a scouting expedition the week before. Doeg took David aside, and told him what the king had said: "Behold the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee. Now, therefore, be the king's son-in-law, for it hath come to the ear of the king that thou lovest the Princess Michal, his daughter."

The heart of the young soldier began to thump wildly in his breast in spite of himself, but he answered as calmly as he could, "Seemeth it to thee a small thing, O Doeg, to be a king's son-in-law, seeing I am poor and but lightly esteemed?"

"Let not small matters trouble thee, David," said Doeg, pompously. "The king said, 'Thus shall ye say to David: The king desireth not any dowry, but that thou shalt slaughter an hundred of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of his enemies.'"

David could not hide his happiness. "Tell the king, O Doeg, to be of good cheer, for I will avenge

THE GAME OF DOEG

him of his enemies, and will put to the sword even more of these Philistines than he hath asked."

"That I doubt not," said Doeg, in his most flattering manner. "Did I not see thee kill a lion with thy naked hands when thou wast yet beardless? There is none like thee in Israel."

"I will do my very best," said David, earnestly. "What length of time shall I have in which to accomplish this thing?"

"On the morning of the fourth day thou shalt report thy adventure and thy success."

"Sooner than that, O Doeg," laughed David.

Doeg went back to King Saul, and told him how eagerly David had taken up with the terms offered. "He is even now preparing for the invasion," he said, "but acting hastily, as he is, and blinded by his love for thy daughter, the Princess Michal, he will be at the mercy of the Philistines, and is almost sure to be mortally hurt upon the battle-field."

While David was making his preparations for raiding the Philistines' land, seeing that the weapons of the soldiers were sharp, and that they had provisions enough, Prince Jonathan came into his tent.

"It has all come to pass, Jonathan. The king, thy father, hath set me a task whereby I shall win the Princess Michal, and I go forth this night. I thank thee, Jonathan, for bringing thy father to this mind."

A BROKEN PLEDGE

"Thank me not, David. I had nothing to do with this thing. My father hath been in such a state that I have not dared approach him on any subject for three days. He hath seen no one but Doeg."

"Doeg brought me the message."

"This stranger hath my father's ear, but not I," said Jonathan, gloomily. "I will assist thee in thy task. What is it?"

"That I kill an hundred Philistines."

"Come, we shall double the number, and this time my father shall keep his word. It will be best not to let my father know that I go with thee. That might anger him again."

As soon as it was dark, David, with Prince Jonathan and a large detachment of picked men, went silently marching across the borders into the enemy's country. About midnight they fell upon a camp of the Philistines, sleeping without any guards on duty. The battle was short and decisive, and, as Jonathan had said, they doubled the number required by King Saul, and carried the trophies of the slain back with them.

When the news was brought to the king in the early morning, that David and his men stood at the palace gate with two hundred heads of the Philistines, he was seized with a paroxysm of rage and despair. His handsome face became distorted, and the servants ran as far from him as they could, lest

THE GAME OF DOEG

he kill them. With a mighty effort he pulled himself together somewhat, and ordered David to come before him. Ruddy and handsome, the young fellow came in and stood before the monarch, who, shaking like a leaf in the wind, sat with his crown on his head and his spear in his hand.

“The Lord is with thee, David,” said the king. David bowed low, and kissed the king’s hand.

“How many Philistines did I say?”

“An hundred, O king.”

“And how many heads hast thou brought?”

“Two hundred, O king. And now may thy servant find favor in thy sight, for I love Princess Michal.”

“Let the marriage be heralded,” said the king, “and now out of my presence, every one but Doeg.”

David and the Princess Michal were married at once, lest the king change his mind, and they were given a beautiful house to live in, built fairly on top of the city wall. David was now indeed the king’s son-in-law, and the king was afraid of him—afraid, because David succeeded in everything he undertook, and because the people loved him; afraid, because he dreamed by day and by night, whether waking or sleeping, that David was to be king in his place.

Having been defeated so many times by the Hebrews, the Philistines began to gather their strength again in good earnest. Their princes and lords called their fighting men together for a new war. David

A BROKEN PLEDGE

showed himself wiser in dealing with them than all those that served the king, but this only made King Saul more jealous. He heard nothing but praises of David and accounts of his brave exploits all day long. At first the people had been very enthusiastic over the king that Judge Samuel had given to them, who, looking brave and strong and handsome, had gone out to lead them against their enemies. Now he sat in his palace and feared to leave the inner court, while David led them to battle. It was said that the king was ill of a strange malady, which baffled the physicians that came to study his case.

One day the king ordered the physicians out of his sight on pain of death, and sent for Jonathan, Abner, and Doeg in secret conference. To these he confided his fears, that David had aspirations to the throne, and commanded them, for the safety of his kingdom and for the sake of Prince Jonathan's succession, to have him put to death. Prince Jonathan dared not contradict the king's passionate words, but, as soon as he could get away, he ran to David and told him, "King Saul, my father, seeketh to kill thee. Now hide thyself in a secret place until morning, and I shall talk with my father about thee."

So David hid away in a secret place that he knew of, and Prince Jonathan went to the king. He found him in deep dejection, sitting with his head bowed and his face drawn with grief. He talked with him

THE GAME OF DOEG

about David, beginning with the killing of Goliath of Gath, and showing how David's works had been good in every case.

"He took his life into his hand, and slew the Philistine," Jonathan pleaded. "Thou sawest it, my father, and didst rejoice. Then why wouldst thou slay David without a cause? He hath raided the enemy's country repeatedly with success, and only lately hath he brought thee two hundred heads of the Philistines as a dowry for Princess Michal. I pray thee, my father, put these evil thoughts against David out of thy mind."

Suddenly the king began to weep, and he turned to the prince, exclaiming: "As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain. Call my son-in-law to me, and let us be friends together as in times past, and bid him bring his harp, and sing to me, and divert this evil spirit that is upon me. Never shall I raise my hand against David, my son-in-law, again. I swear it."

Prince Jonathan went and brought David to the king, and the three discussed affairs, and David played and sang again, while the king rested on his ivory couch. Then, for a few days, his majesty seemed to gain in health and strength, physically and mentally.

The princes of the Philistines had brought together a considerable army, and King Saul went out with David against them, and gained a great victory. But again jealousy spoiled the victory for the king. Be-

A BROKEN PLEDGE

cause David had made so many invasions into that country, the Philistines, some of them, had taken him for the king, and they had shouted "King David!" instead of "King Saul!" when they caught sight of him in the battle. All the king's old fears and his hatred of David returned. He forgot his pledges to his son Jonathan. "Now this David must die," he thought, "and since the weapons of the enemy seem powerless to hurt him, I will slay him with my own hands."

The king had grown quiet and cunning, and he told his plans to no one this time, not even to Doeg. He pretended to have a great affection for David, and when they were in the royal city again, he ordered him to sing and play for him in the evening, in the palace garden on the roof. Here rows of brilliant-hued carnations surrounded the battlements, and fountains sparkled, even small trees were growing there. It was an enchanting spot, especially in the cool of the day, when David brought his harp, and stood leaning against the wall opposite the king, who lay on his canopied couch in a sheltered place. In the middle of his song David saw the king put his hand stealthily behind him, and the next instant a javelin gleamed in his hand, which he hurled with great force. The young man sprang aside, and the spear drove itself into the wall where he had been standing.

Seeing that the king had turned away from him,

THE GAME OF DOEG

David fled with all possible haste. Another spear followed, which barely missed his head as he went down the stairs. He left the palace instantly, and went to his own house.

CHAPTER IX

THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS



THE Princess Michal, David's young and pretty wife, though she had loved her handsome father all through her childhood, was now greatly in dread of him, fearing that in a fit of passion he would hurt or kill her husband. When she saw David running in, pale and agitated, she cried out in alarm, "What evil hath befallen thee, David?"

David folded her in his arms, and kissed her.

"It is the king, my father, I know it is."

"Thy father twice lifted his hand against me this night, and just missed pinning me to the wall with a javelin. He hath surely turned his face against me, and I know not what wrong I have done."

"O my husband," sobbed Michal, clinging to him, "where is Jonathan? He can tell us what to do, for I feel in my heart that this is the end of peace between thee and my father. He will send after thee and tear thee out of my arms. Listen! Some one is knocking at the door."

She ran to the window and looked down. "It is Jonathan! Jonathan!" she cried, and hurried to let him in.

THE GAME OF DOEG

“ We have still a friend in Jonathan,” said David, smiling, “ and while we have such a friend all is not lost.”

“ What is our father’s state of mind?” asked Michal, anxiously.

“ He goeth from one paroxysm into another, and he will not hear sense or reason. The javelin sticketh in the wall where he hurled it. He hath ordered the street before this house to be patrolled until morning, when David is to be slain.”

“ Slain! Then the vile soldiers that do my father’s bidding shall slay me too,” cried Michal, clinging desperately to David again.

“ Let them take me before the king, and let me be judged in the presence of the elders, and if fault is found in me, let me die,” said David.

“ What hast thou done but fight the king’s battles and win glory for him?” sobbed poor little Michal.

“ My father is beyond self-control,” said Prince Jonathan. “ He would discover a fault where there is none. Let not the sun find thee here when it rises, David. I have thought of a way to save thee, and the Lord is with thee, David. Take courage! Soldiers are patrolling the street, and other soldiers are at the city gate, to see that thou dost not pass out that way; but no one is guarding the little window over the wall, and it will soon be dark.”

Princess Michal’s face brightened, though her tears

THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

still fell fast. She began to see a ray of hope for David.

“Is there a rope in the house?” asked Jonathan.

“Yes, there is one, and it is stout and long,” and the Princess Michal ran and brought it. Jonathan fastened one end around a beam inside the little window over the wall. Then he tied several knots in the length of it, to grasp hold of in slipping down, and he coiled it all up under the window.

“When thou art gone,” said Jonathan, “Michal shall place a log in the bed to look like a man, and when the soldiers enter the house in the morning, she must tell them that David is sick, and she must hold them off as long as she possibly can, so that David may get far away, to a place of safety. I shall go down into the street, and engage the soldiers in conversation, and as soon as I am gone, do as I have said.”

“But where is he going?” Michal pleaded piteously. “Where can my husband go and be safe?”

“I shall go to Judge Samuel, who is living retired, superintending the school of the prophets in the little hamlet of Naioth, near Ramah,” declared David, with sudden inspiration.

“That is just the place, and my father will never dare take thee from Judge Samuel,” agreed Jonathan. “Remain there until my father’s passion abates, and remember that Jonathan is thy friend and brother

THE GAME OF DOEG

always. We have no time to lose, for if my father find thee here in the morning, thou art a dead man. The Lord be with thee, David."

A moment more and Prince Jonathan was gone out into the street, and the Princess Michal was clinging to David in a last farewell. Then he put her away, and let the rope slide out of the window, down the side of the wall. She watched him drop, hand over hand, to the ground, and then the darkness swallowed him. She gave herself no time to indulge in her heart-breaking grief, for she could not tell what moment the soldiers might come to take David and kill him. The king might become too impatient for the execution of this deed to wait even until morning. Quickly she took a log, and placed it on the divan, to represent the body of a man. Then she took the pillow of goat's hair from the back of the divan, and arranged it as the head of the man, spreading the goat's hair so that it lay tumbled on the pillow like a man's hair. Over this she spread a large mantle, using all her skill to make the whole look like a man asleep and well covered with a mantle.

The Princess Michal did not sleep that night. She listened at the window for the measured tread of soldiers in the street, and sometimes she smiled faintly, to think how dismayed they would be in the morning to find their supposed prisoner gone. She went often to the divan and rearranged the log and

THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

the goat's hair pillow and the mantle, trying to make sure that they looked like David asleep there. When she heard the knocking at the door in the early morning and heard a voice call, "Open in the king's name," she went to the lattice in front, and asked what was wanted.

"The king desireth the presence of his son-in-law, and commands that he open the door and come forth and proceed to him at once."

"David, my husband, is sick in his bed."

"Open the door and let us see the king's son-in-law sick in his bed, that we may tell it to the king."

The Princess Michal saw that she must obey. She went down and opened the door, and Doeg entered with several armed soldiers.

"Come ye thus armed to the house of the king's daughter?" she exclaimed, hoping to keep them back yet a few moments.

"We are here by order of the king, thy father," said the burly Doeg. "Where is thy husband sick in his bed?"

The princess stood in the doorway of the sleeping-room, which she had darkened as much as possible, and faced Doeg and the soldiers.

"The king's son-in-law hath been sick all night in his bed, as I have told thee," she said firmly, "and now he sleeps from weariness. Go to the king, my

THE GAME OF DOEG

father, and say to him that David will come as soon as he is able."

Doeg hesitated, looking over her head into the darkened room, where he thought he could see David lying on the divan, with his hair tumbled in disorder over the pillow.

"Hast thou forgotten thy respect to the king's daughter?" exclaimed the princess. "Be gone to my father with the message, and chase the rabble out of the street as thou goest, that he may rest."

"Do ye guard the house till I send to the king," said Doeg to the soldiers, who retreated to the street, where a crowd was already gathering.

A messenger ran quickly to the palace, and told King Saul that David was sick in his bed, but before he had his message fairly out of his mouth, the frenzied monarch shouted, "Bring my son-in-law up to me in his bed, that I may slay him." This command was carried back to Doeg.

Even the king's daughter was disregarded now, and it was with ill-concealed satisfaction that Doeg brushed past her, and made a way for the soldiers. The moment he reached the side of the divan, he saw the trick that had been played, and, jerking off the mantle, disclosed the log and the goat's hair pillow.

As the soldiers could not bring David to the king, because he was not there, they brought the Princess

THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

Michal to her father, and told him how she had tricked them.

He looked mournfully at the princess and said, "Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped?"

"David is not thine enemy, O my father," pleaded Princess Michal. "He is thy loyal subject."

But the king commanded her to keep silent, and gave orders to Doeg to see that she was not permitted to leave the palace.

David was a fleet runner, and before morning dawned he had crossed the country to Naioth, and was safely housed with the old Judge Samuel, whom he had not seen since he parted from him on that memorable morning at the foot of the hill of Bethlehem. He told the good old man all that had happened to him since, and the great trouble he was in.

"Thou art not safe even here with me," the judge said, when he had heard all. "Prosperity and power have turned Saul's head, and made a tyrant of him. I think he would not dare do me personal injury, but he might not hesitate to take thee from my charge, if he found thee here. Yet, this is the school where he himself was educated under my guidance, and if he still cherisheth tender recollections of that time, he may leave thee unmolested, and when his fury is spent he may think better of his intentions."

So David remained with Judge Samuel in the

THE GAME OF DOEG

school of the prophets, where a part of King Saul's young manhood had been spent in the study of the laws of his country, both religious and civil, and David was installed as a pupil among a hundred or more other young men. An important part of each day's work was the study of music and the singing of hymns. There was a large choir, to which David was admitted without delay. He very quickly learned the melodies, and his sweet, clear voice could be heard above all the rest.

This was a wonderful time for David. He forgot his troubles while he was pouring out his soul in song. For a brief time all his former life seemed forgotten, and nothing in the future troubled him. He became a great favorite with the young priests and students, as he always did with people wherever he went. But this peace and rest were not to last long.

Doeg soon found out David's hiding-place, and informed the king, who immediately sent messengers to take his son-in-law and bring him back to court.

One day, when the students were singing the hymns, and the old judge, with his white flowing locks and his saintly face, stood in his place before the choir, with uplifted hands, directing, there was a commotion at the doorway of the school room, and officers of the king were seen to enter.

The aged teacher observed them, and he knew well enough upon what business they had come, but

THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

he went on directing, solemnly and reverently, as if the anthems the young men were singing were of so sacred a nature that they must not be interrupted even by the king's messengers.

David's singing was well known in the camp of the soldiers of King Saul's army, and now they heard his superb voice attuned in harmony with all the rest, leading them in the beautiful music that rose and fell, now low and vibrant, now tumultuous. The rough soldiers were spellbound. These were the men who sang and called to one another from hilltop to hilltop in the harvest time at home, when there was peace instead of war. Moved by the resistless impulse of the music, they joined in singing the praises of God. In great swelling waves it filled the room. It was a new song, which David himself had made, and the choir was trying it for the first time. It began;

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.

The soldiers forgot the errand upon which they had been sent by King Saul, and went back without David. It was a strange thing, but these men were so overcome by the music they had heard and taken part in that they could think of nothing else and remember nothing else for several hours.

"Where is my son-in-law?" King Saul demanded. They looked at each other helplessly, and one stammered, "He is singing in the sacred choir, O king."

THE GAME OF DOEG

“Why have ye not brought him before me, as I commanded?”

“The spirit of the Lord was upon us, and we could not take him,” faltered another. The others nodded their heads. “Yes, O king, the spirit of the Lord moved in our hearts, and we did sing also.”

“Cast these unworthy servants into prison and send others,” commanded the king, in deep disgust.

Other messengers were sent the next day, and they arrived, like the first, at the time of the choir singing. In their ears rang a voice they knew, David’s voice, and it sang with the harps and other instruments accompanying:

Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed; He will hear him from His holy heaven.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord, our God.

Then, according to custom, all the voices took up the new verse and sang it, and a wonderful impulse made the soldiers sing too. A great volume of praise filled the school room again, and these soldiers too forgot that they had come to take David, the king’s son-in-law, and went back without him, lifting their faces to the sky as they walked. So they came to the king, whose anger blazed even before he saw them, for Doeg had informed him that they were coming without David.

“Where have ye left my son-in-law?” he thundered.

THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

“ He remains singing in the sacred choir at Naioth, O king,” replied the leader of the troop.

“ And why have ye not brought him before me, as I commanded? ”

“ O king, the spirit of the Lord came upon us, and we also sang.”

“ Ye shall sing another song now,” exclaimed the frenzied monarch. “ Cast them into prison and send others.”

This time the constable Doeg picked the messengers with care. He sent the roughest fighting men in King Saul's guard, men known to scoff at sacred music and very unlikely to be influenced by the religious exercises of the school. It was already known that the others had failed in their duty, and were in prison, and these men set out upon their journey pledged to accomplish the task intrusted to them. Hours passed, while the king waited and raged up and down the court of his palace, having only one thought in his mind, to get David in his power.

At last a runner came with the startling news, “ The servants of the king stand in the school of the prophets singing the sacred songs, as the other two bands of messengers did.”

“ Are all my servants fools? ” exclaimed the king, in desperate rage and disappointment. “ Now I will take my enemy with my own hands,” and he put on his armor and took his spear in his hand and went out

THE GAME OF DOEG

of the palace. He left the royal city, striding fiercely at first, with no other thought than to take David; but as the air blew upon him, and he saw the sheep feeding in the pastures, and the blue sky above, he began to wonder what it was that had made his messengers behave as they had. He came to a great well in the countryside, where the people were continually coming for water, and as he sat and rested there, no one recognizing him, he heard them talking about the school of the prophets in Naioth, and of the festival of song that was going on there. He spoke to one of them and asked, "Is Judge Samuel at Naioth?"

"Yes, and David, the king's son-in-law, is with him, and we hear such singing as we never heard before."

"What is the occasion of this special music?"

"We know not, but whoever enters the school, the spirit of the Lord comes upon him, and he sings with the choir. We have even seen the king's soldiers enter there, and we have heard them sing."

The king walked on, and all at once it came over him with a rush of feeling, that once he had been a member of that choir, and he had learned the sacred hymns and exercises. Some of the old melodies came back to him as he went along, and he could not help chanting them. When he was far off, he could hear the voices of the young men singing, and he lifted up his own voice with theirs, and went along the road

THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

singing. He came at last to the door of the school, and saw the rows of long-gowned young men with musical instruments in their hands, psalteries, tabrets, pipes, and harps; and he beheld the white-haired judge, whom he had not seen since that day when he had laid hold of his mantle and torn it, and the judge had said, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than thou."

Remorse seized upon King Saul's heart, and a frenzy of exaltation possessed him. He tore off his armor and cast it down, and threw aside the rich robe that he wore, and took his place in the choir with the young men, and sang with them with all his power, until he fell down upon the floor in a sort of trance. There he lay for several hours.

Judge Samuel was deeply moved, but he advised David to leave the school without delay, for the king's enmity might remain unchanged when he came out of his religious trance.

Resolved to see once more those he loved best, David went with all haste back to the royal city, to see Prince Jonathan. He came in secretly at night-fall, and had the good fortune to find his friend without trouble, and he told him all that had happened at the school.

"What have I done, Jonathan? What is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" asked

THE GAME OF DOEG

David, brokenly, as they clasped each other's hands.

"Take courage, brother," said the prince. "Perhaps the Lord hath wrought a change in my father's heart, and he will pursue thee no more."

"But what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life continually?" David pleaded.

"I know not what it is, but thou shalt not die. My father doeth nothing, either great or small, but that he shows it to me, and why should he hide this thing from me? I tell thee, David, it is not true that he meant to kill thee. He desired to bring thee back to the court."

"Then how dost thou account for his throwing the javelin at me and sending to take me in my bed?"

"Thou knowest his affliction, David, and that we all do fear him at times."

"I know it, but thou art not in danger of thy life with him, while I—as truly as the Lord liveth, Jonathan—if I stay here thou shalt either see me killed or hear of my death from others. Thy father knoweth that thou and I we are sworn friends, and he hath kept this thing from thee, lest it grieve thee. I tell thee, there is but a step between me and death."

"I fear it is even so," said Jonathan, sadly. "Ask me anything thou wilt, and if it is within my power, I will do it for thee."

"I believe thou lovest me, Jonathan, even as I love thee, and for thy sake and Michal's sake I will

THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

make one more effort to be reconciled to thy father. To-morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at dinner, but let me go and hide myself in the field just beyond the place where we have been together so often to practise shooting with the bow. If thy father miss me at all, or ask why I am absent, say that I am gone to my own city to visit my people. If he say, 'It is well that he went,' take it as a good sign, but if he be angry, then be sure that evil is determined by him, and that all his feelings of remorse have passed from him."

Prince Jonathan stood silent for a moment. It was hard for him to believe, in spite of all that had happened, that his father was of so cruel, vindictive, jealous a nature.

"Deal kindly with me in this matter," said David, earnestly. "Forget not our covenant together that we made; but, Jonathan, if I have done any wrong, slay me thyself, and do not bring me to thy father."

"Let us go out into the field," said Prince Jonathan, impulsively, and they left the city together, walking silently side by side until they reached the field. Then the prince said, "David, my brother, if I knew certainly that evil was determined against thee by my father, I would surely tell thee, for I love thee as my own soul, and I call God as my witness that I will never break my promise to thee. I will

THE GAME OF DOEG

find out my father's inmost soul, whether he meaneth good or evil to thee."

"And what if thy father answer thee roughly? Who shall tell me?"

"I will come to thee. Hide thyself, and on the third day from this come to the great stone in the field, where we have practised our exercises and keep hidden behind it. I will come with only one servant, and will shoot three arrows at the mark. If I say these words to the lad, 'The arrows are on this side of thee, take them,' then come out to me, for all is well. But if I say to him, 'The arrows are beyond thee,' go, and the Lord keep thee, for there will be no safety for thee here with my father. But the Lord will be between me and thee forever."

So they parted. Prince Jonathan went back to the city, and David to a lonely hiding-place among the rocks and bushes in the field.

The king returned from the school of the prophets, and when the new moon appeared, he sat down to dinner upon his seat by the wall. Abner, the captain of the king's host, sat next to him, and Prince Jonathan was near, but David's place was empty.

CHAPTER X

THE SWORD OF GOLIATH

ON the first day of the new moon the king said nothing about his son-in-law, but by the second day he had persuaded himself that David should have come to the table, and should have believed that his king had meant peace to him by going to the school of the prophets and singing with the disciples. The king tried to persuade himself that he really had meant peace, and David's remaining away, he thought, showed lack of faith in his motives. That he had done very little to inspire David with faith in him, he did not consider. He was a man who wanted to do as he pleased, get all the praise, and have all his mistakes overlooked. Though he should have known that David would naturally hesitate about coming to the feast after the surly treatment his king had accorded to him, his suspicions were aroused more than ever before, and he felt sure now that David was laying plans to get possession of the kingdom.

Soon after they were seated, he said abruptly to Jonathan, "Why is the son of Jesse absent from the feast to-day and yesterday?"

THE GAME OF DOEG

“ David earnestly asked leave of me to run down to Bethlehem, his city, for he said, ‘ There is a yearly sacrifice there for all my family, and my brother hath commanded me to be there, ’ ” replied Prince Jonathan.

This was true, though David had not gone to the gathering of his family, but was waiting in the field for word from the prince.

King Saul’s anger was aroused against his son, and his rage grew beyond control in a moment. His eyes glared as he cried out: “ Do I not know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to be thine own companion? Thou art an enemy to thy father’s peace and thine own. As long as the son of Jesse is upon the ground, thou shalt not be established nor thy kingdom. Send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die.”

“ O my father, why shall he be slain? What hath he done? ” demanded Jonathan, rising in his place, his eyes flashing.

Words no longer sufficed to express the king’s wrath. He seized his javelin, and made a powerful lunge at Jonathan. Had it not been for the interference of Abner and others, he would have killed his own son.

Jonathan left the table in fierce anger, without tasting a mouthful of food. He loved his misguided father, and he knew that his father loved him more

THE SWORD OF GOLIATH

than anyone else on earth, yet he had lifted up his hand to kill him. He could not sleep that night for grief, because his father had sought to kill him, and because David was condemned to death. Before daylight he left the city with a little servant lad, to keep his promise to David. As he often went to practise at athletic exercises at about that hour, his going forth aroused no comment.

Arrived at the appointed place, he said to the little lad, "Run now and find out the arrows which I shoot." The youngster ran, and the prince shot the arrows beyond him, and then called out loudly, as he had agreed with David, "The arrows are beyond thee."

David, hearing this in his hiding-place, knew that there was no more peace for him, and that he must find some better place of concealment at once, or lose his head to the jealous king.

Prince Jonathan, feeling that he must see David and speak to him once more, sent the servant back to the city with the bow and arrows, while he walked on to the great stone. On coming near, he called David, who rose up from behind it, looking worn and disheveled, for he had spent two days in that wild place.

Jonathan threw his arms around him, and they kissed each other, and for a while their tears fell so fast that they could neither of them speak. This

THE GAME OF DOEG

seemed the end of everything to the young men, who loved each other so dearly. When the prince could find his voice at last, he said, "God is with thee, David. He will not forsake thee, and thou wilt overcome thy enemies as the judge hath told thee, even though my father be one of them. Only remember this, if anything happens and I die, show kindness to my children, and preserve their lives. I give up my claim to the throne to thee, for I know thou art more worthy, and I will be second in the kingdom. But I must be with the king to the last. He is my father."

"The Lord shall deal with us and with the king thy father," said David, brokenly, "but on thy part, Jonathan, promise me that thou wilt comfort and encourage thy little sister, Michal, my wife," and again David's tears fell fast.

"Hast thou any plan in thy mind?" asked Jonathan, after he had promised to watch over Princess Michal.

"I will go first to Nob, the city of the priests, where I laid up the sword of Goliath before the Lord, and perhaps they will give it to me, seeing my necessity, that I may not be defenseless. Thereafter the wilderness, and then—I know not what."

After repeated promises and vows of friendship, the two young men parted, for they both knew the danger to David if he remained longer in the vicinity

THE SWORD OF GOLIATH

of the king. Having made a quick decision to go to Nob, the city of the priests, and try to get the sword of Goliath, David started for that place with all possible haste, thinking as he went along what to say to the priests, and how he would explain his needs. He was afraid that if he told them all about his trouble with the king, they might hesitate to help him; and if they helped him knowing of his separation from King Saul, he was afraid they might be put to death by the king in his anger, should he find it out.

When he reached the city of Nob, and arrived at the priests' house, he had made up his mind, and he said: "I am on a secret business, and have left the royal city in such haste that I had no time to provide myself with food or a weapon."

The priest Ahimelech was afraid, for the troubles between David and King Saul were known to some extent through the land, and he asked David, "Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?"

"I have sent my servants to other points," said David, "and now wilt thou do the king's servant a kindness, and give me what bread thou hast at hand?"

"There is no common bread, but only hallowed bread, which is made for the priests alone," replied Ahimelech, much troubled, "and yet every law should yield to the law of mercy. Take what thou art in need of, O David."

THE GAME OF DOEG

Very thankfully David took the bread, and put it in his bag, to carry it with him. Then he asked, "Hast thou a sword or a spear that I may take?"

"No," replied Ahimelech, "we have no weapons."

At that moment Abiathar, the priest's son, came in and saw David, and he greeted him joyfully, for he knew him. When he found out what David wanted, he said, "There is one sword here, even the great sword of the giant, Goliath of Gath, whom thou didst kill. And who is a better man to carry it in time of necessity than our champion David, who took it from the Philistines?"

"Surely it is here, O David," said Ahimelech, "wrapped up in a cloth, since thou thyself didst dedicate it to the Lord. Take that if thou wilt. There is no other."

"There is none like that," said David. "Give it to me."

David, though not above average height, was a powerfully built, muscular young man, as his exploits have shown. He girded on the heavy sword of Goliath with perfect ease, and was thanking the priest and preparing to go, when he saw a figure pass like a shadow behind the linen draperies at the farther end of the room. A moment later the evil face of Doeg appeared at the opening. A flash of recognition from David's eyes was met by a returning one from Doeg, and the face vanished on the instant.



A MOMENT LATER THE EVIL FACE OF DOEG APPEARED AT THE OPENING

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

THE SWORD OF GOLIATH

David had not learned that Doeg had led the soldiers who tried to take him prisoner in his bed, and he had always counted him as one of his friends, though he had sometimes felt uncertain of his good faith, and he knew that Prince Jonathan did not fully trust him. Any idea that Doeg was his friend was now dispelled. David felt sure that he would report his visit to the priests' house to the king. It was near night, and he hastened to put a safe distance between himself and Nob.

He was now a wanderer in good earnest. He dared not go to his home in Bethlehem. He even feared that the king might wreak vengeance on his innocent family there, his old father and mother, and his brothers with their children. Turning his steps toward the wilderness, as the wild, uncultivated part of the country was called, he was soon out of immediate danger, among the rocks and caves of the mountains, and yet not many miles from Bethlehem.

He went to a cave he had sometimes visited when near the place in the summer time with his flocks. Its opening was high up on the mountain side, and approached by a ledge of rocks. After searching its recesses carefully, to be sure there were no wild beasts in it, he made up his mind that he could live very well there with his good sword for protection, his cloak for a covering at night, with grapes and wild fruits all around him and plenty of game to snare.

THE GAME OF DOEG

Being used to outdoor life, he saw no hardship in all this, except that he was hunted from his home and friends like a wild beast, and dared live in no other way. But it was lonesome without even the sheep for company, and each day as it passed seemed longer and more dreary than the one before.

King Saul heard conflicting stories concerning David's flight, and spies brought him word that the young man was now in this part of the country and now in that, collecting forces and men about him. The servants attached to Saul personally, with the exception of Doeg, who was an Edomite, were all Benjamites, that is, men of his own tribe in the kingdom of Palestine. One day he led them out to a pleasant grove on the top of a small hill, and they sat there under a canopy in the shade, according to the custom of kings and princes in that beautiful climate, discussing matters of state. The king held his spear in his hand, and the men stood around him ready to do his slightest bidding. Doeg was chief spokesman, and as he was the steward of the servants and in the favor of the king, they all stood greatly in awe of him. As usual the king was irritable and complained about everything.

"Where is this son of Jesse?" he asked petulantly, "Who hath heard of him lately?"

"I heard that David went to King Achish in

THE SWORD OF GOLIATH

Gath," said one, "and that the king feared him because of Goliath, and would not entertain him."

"It was told me," said another, "that thy son-in-law hath gone to the land of Moab, whence came his grandmother Ruth, and that he hath taken his father and mother there."

"Is he not fortified with his men in the watch-tower of Mizpeh in Moab?" questioned a third.

The king listened gloomily. "Hear now, ye Benjamites," he reproached, "perhaps the son of Jesse will give everyone of you fields and vineyards and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, because no one of you hath told me the truth, that my son Jonathan hath made a league with the son of Jesse."

No one made answer, for who would have dared accuse the prince even if they had heard it? The king glowered, first on one, then on another, across his spear. "All of you have conspired against me, and there is none that is sorry for me, or telleth me that Jonathan hath stirred up my son-in-law against me, to make him lie in wait for me, as he doth this day."

Still no one answered the king's complaining accusations, but Doeg began to fondle his glossy beard and to look as if he could say something if he would.

"Can none of you speak a word?" said the king, petulantly.

THE GAME OF DOEG

Then Doeg answered, as one who spoke when he willed and kept silent when he willed, not like the others, who looked afraid either to speak or to keep silent. "I saw the son of Jesse at Nob, the city of the priests, with Ahimelech the priest, on a day not long ago when I went thither to perform a vow."

The king started up excitedly. "With Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub?"

"Yes, O king, and Ahimelech gave him victuals to carry with him on a journey, and the sword of Goliath, the Philistine, to gird at his side, and he inquired of the Lord for him as to the direction he should take."

"Why hast thou not spoken before, O Doeg?"

"Was it for Doeg to enlighten the king upon a family matter, the telling of which lay within the duty of Prince Jonathan?"

"Hath my son known of this thing and informed me not?"

"Thy servant inferred that the prince knew the intentions of the son of Jesse, for on the day of the feast of the new moon, when he left the king's table in anger, he did hold an interview with the king's son-in-law in the practice field beyond the city."

"How knowest thou, O Doeg?"

"There is a discreet lad in the service of Prince Jonathan who runneth after his arrows in the practice field."

THE SWORD OF GOLIATH

“Behold the duty of a son to his father, O Benjamites,” cried the king, in a voice so terrible that they all trembled. Only Doeg was calm and self-possessed, exulting in his power over the king and ready to meet any mood that possessed the royal mind. The king behaved like an angry child. The pity was that he must be obeyed, whether his demands were just or not.

“Send and call Ahimelech the priest to me,” he commanded, “and all his father’s house and all the priests that are in Nob. We shall make an example of these unworthy servants.”

The king laughed for the first time in days, and his servants laughed with him, not daring to do otherwise. Guards were dispatched to summon the unfortunate priests before King Saul, whose wrath increased from moment to moment.

The priests came at the summons, driven along the highway by the soldiers like sheep. Only one of the priests that lived in Nob failed to come at the king’s bidding, Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, who had remembered to give David the great sword of Goliath.

A rumor that David was a fugitive from the king had reached the priests’ city, and knowing what a quarrel between the king and David might mean to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem, Abiathar had gone there to give the family information of all that he

THE GAME OF DOEG

knew and to warn them to be on their guard. On that very day the king's guard came to Nob.

The priests were brought before King Saul, who sat in state with his crown on his head and his spear in his hand, looking like a grim monument to vengeance.

He disdained to call Ahimelech by name, but he thundered, "Hear now, thou son of Ahitub!"

The priest answered meekly, "Here I am, my lord, O king."

"Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse? It seems that thou hast given him bread and the sword of Goliath, and hast inquired of God for him, to strengthen him to lie in wait for me and rise against me when he so desireth."

"Thou hast been misinformed, O king, for who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, the king's son-in-law, who goeth and cometh at thy bidding, and is honored in thy house? And if I inquired of the Lord for him, I knew not that he was an outcast from thee."

The king's hand shook with the spear in it when he heard David praised, and his voice trembled with wrath as he said:

"Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou and all thy father's house."

He turned to the soldiers of his own guard standing around him and commanded them,

THE SWORD OF GOLIATH

“ Turn ye and slay the priests of the Lord, because their hand is against us, and is with David, and because they knew when David fled, and did not tell it to me.”

Not a hand was lifted, not a soldier moved in his place, and threateningly the king repeated his command.

Then the chief of the guard said: “ O king, we dare not bring the blood of the priests of God upon our hands. Behold this Edomite, let him perform the king’s command.”

The king wheeled furiously around toward Doeg then, and commanded him to slay the priests, and Doeg did not refuse, but struck down every one of them in turn, while the guard looked on.

Even then King Saul was not satisfied. He sent Doeg with other soldiers, less scrupulous than those of his guard, to destroy Nob, the city of the priests, with every living thing in it. And this was done. Only Abiathar of the whole city escaped.

One morning David, having arisen from his bed of dried grass and leaves in the cave in the mountains, stood in the doorway watching the sunrise gilding the hilltops, when he discovered three figures making their way cautiously up the mountain side. Thinking them to be his enemies and servants of the king, he kept out of sight, but as they came nearer he recognized among them Abiathar, the son of the priest, who

THE GAME OF DOEG

had given him bread and the sword. He rushed out to meet them, and found that the other two were young men with whom he had become acquainted during his short stay at the school of the prophets. Abiathar fell down at his feet, sobbing and moaning as if he had lost all his friends, and this, we know, was the case. As soon as he could speak, he told all that had happened to his father and the priests and the city of Nob, and the reason of his own escape, how he had gone on that day to Bethlehem to give the house of Jesse information about David.

“I alone have escaped,” moaned the unhappy young priest again. “They are all dead, even the little ones. Doeg, the Edomite, the keeper of the king’s affairs, was in the priests’ house that day to perform a vow, and he must have seen what took place between thee and my father and me.”

“I knew it that day,” groaned David, “when I saw the face of Doeg, the Edomite, peering at me from an opening in the draperies, that he would surely tell King Saul. I have caused the death of the whole of thy father’s house. Who performed this deed, O Abiathar?”

“Doeg and his followers undertook it gladly. The king’s soldiers refused to lift their hands against them.”

“Doeg! I have often felt suspicious of him, for he hath sometimes an evil look, which one cannot

THE SWORD OF GOLIATH

understand, but I could not have believed even he could be so cruel, so lost to all feelings of humanity. It is through thy father's kindness to me that all this hath happened. We will join our fortunes, Abiathar, and do what seemeth best to us. But why have the warrior Abishai and the student Gad joined thee in thy flight? Are ye also in trouble, my friends?"

"Abiathar came to us at the school," said Gad, "and when he had told the story, and that thou wast a fugitive in the mountains, we could not help coming to thee, to join our fortunes to thine and help thee, if possible."

"Then the Lord hath not forgotten me, but hath sent me friends," said David, clasping their hands, while the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Thou must send for thy family and friends," Gad continued. "No connection of thine is safe now from the king's wrath. He hath sworn enmity against them all. They must come to thee. I have already sent messengers to friends of mine, who will join us here as soon as they can, and fight on thy side."

"A troop of my own intimate friends in the army will also be here, to aid thee," declared Abishai, who was a famous warrior.

"I can only thank you now, my men," David answered, "for your love and kindness to me, but if ever David, the son of Jesse, hath power to do what he will, you shall be rewarded."

CHAPTER XI

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

IN the course of a few days David's father and mother and all his brothers and their families came to the retreat in the mountains, and in a few weeks' time his number of fighting men had increased to four hundred, many of whom were in disfavor with the tyrannical king, and almost as much in danger of their lives as he. Everyone that was in debt or in distress, or was discontented, came to David in the cave in the mountains, and he became their captain.

They led a free life, and did not mind the hardships they had to endure in the least; but life without home comforts was hard on the feeble old man Jesse and his equally helpless wife. David hardly knew what to do with his father and mother, but at length he made up his mind, in spite of the danger of the undertaking, to make a journey to an adjoining kingdom, and ask protection of the king of that country for them, till his own fortunes should be more secure. He felt that he had some claim on the king of Moab, for his great-grandmother Ruth, whose memory was honored among them, was a native of that country.

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

He was obliged to travel in disguise, but he accomplished the mission safely, was received kindly by the king, and left his aged parents in his charge. After that he felt free to go with his band of warriors whithersoever fortune or duty led him. Learning that a certain town not far from his stronghold was besieged by their old enemies, the Philistines, he led his men to its relief, drove the enemy off, and camped near the town, till the people had gathered in their harvest of grain and fruits. The king heard of this adventure, and, thinking he surely had his enemy in his power, ordered troops to the little town to capture him, but just as they were starting, word came that David with his band had departed. Wherever King Saul and his soldiers sought after the fugitives, they were told that David and his men had just left for some other place.

In some way Jonathan found out that they were hidden in a forest in the wilderness of Ziph. He told no one, not even a servant, but, disguising himself as a shepherd in search of lost cattle, he went to David in the woods.

Imagine David's surprise when the king's son appeared before him. They threw their arms around each other, and wept for joy at seeing each other again after months of separation.

"I could not refrain from seeing thee once more," said Jonathan, "when I found out where thou wast

THE GAME OF DOEG

hidden. But fear not, for the hand of my father shall not find thee, and thou shalt surely be king some day, and I shall be next unto thee, and this also my father knoweth. I know what hath increased my father's melancholy and his hatred of thee. He hath told me that years ago, before he ever saw thy face, Judge Samuel became displeased with him, because he disobeyed some of the commands that he had had from the Lord, and Samuel warned him that his kingdom would not stand. He hath seen the judge only once since then, when he thought to take thee at the school of the prophets, and dared not, because of old recollections, and because of the remorse that held him back for a little while. He hath told me also that God speaks to him no more, either through the priests or by dreams, and thinkest thou if God had forsaken thee, thou couldst stand alone?"

"May He never forsake me," said David, fervently. "My heart bleeds for thy father. He is the king, and whatever happens in the future I shall never raise my hand against him. I would support him in his authority as long as he lives, if he would let me. That thou knowest."

"I know thy heart, David, but swear to me once more that thou wilt never forget our vows. Something tells me that I shall never see thee again, my brother."

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

“The Lord our God is witness between us that I do not forget,” said David, brokenly.

So they renewed their covenant together, there under the trees of the forest, and again Jonathan promised to watch over the Princess Michal, who would not be comforted, because David was an out-cast from the king's house and a fugitive in his own land.

“Doth she ever remember me?” David asked.

“Every day I see tears in her eyes, and every day she asks for news of thee,” said Jonathan.

Tears choked their farewells, and Jonathan went away, escorted for a short distance by some of David's guards.

Growing more and more determined to hunt David down and destroy him and his family, root and branch, King Saul called all the fighting men of that section of the country together for war. He told them that he was preparing to attack the Philistines again, but his hidden reason was that he wanted a force large enough to besiege David and his men in their stronghold in the woods and mountains, though King Saul could not find out where David was encamped. David's friends, however, sent the fugitive frequent news of the movements of the royal forces.

Hearing that King Saul and his army were encamped in their vicinity, the men of Ziph sent messengers to him, telling him, “Thy son-in-law is hid-

THE GAME OF DOEG

ing himself in the strongholds in these woods. Come down, O king, according to the desire of thy soul, and we will deliver him into thy hand."

King Saul was overjoyed. At last his enemy was to be delivered into his hand. He wanted to make very sure of his victim, so he said to the messengers: "Go back and take note of all the lurking-places where the son of Jesse hideth himself, and come ye again and tell me certainly, and I will go with you. If he be in this land, I will search for him through the length and breadth of it. And the Lord shall bless the sons of Ziph, because they have had compassion on the king, and have delivered his enemy into his hands."

So the messengers, feeling very important, went on before, and led King Saul and his soldiers to the wilderness of Ziph. But behold, again David was gone, and neither the men of Ziph nor King Saul and his soldiers could find him.

Time after time the king thought he could put his hand upon David, but he was gone like a partridge in the bushes, without leaving a trace of his whereabouts. At last, however, he succeeded in driving him and his entire band up into a mountain and surrounding them. King Saul's victory over his son-in-law now seemed sure. He had but to draw his circle a little tighter and strike the blow, then there would be but one king in Israel, and that King Saul.

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

When civil wars destroy the peace of any country, the enemies on the outside find opportunities they could never get otherwise. So the Philistines, who had always coveted the rich farming land of Palestine, now that they saw King Saul giving all his energy to hunting down his own son-in-law, took this occasion to fall suddenly upon the borders. Frightened runners brought the news into King Saul's camp, and consternation reigned.

“While thou art besieging thine own son-in-law, O king, the Philistine host is besieging thee in like manner from without,” exclaimed Abner, the captain of the king's army.

This was bitterness to King Saul, to be reproached by his chief officer. Yet he could not help but see the necessity of withdrawing his forces from the pursuit of his personal foe, to go against the enemies of the whole country of Palestine.

David and his little band had resolved to contest every point and stand together to the last ditch, though every one should fall in an unequal contest. They were amazed to see King Saul's men forming into line and marching away in great haste. They lost no time in retreating to a stronghold that David had heard of, in an immense cave near the western shore of the Dead Sea. It was situated in a wild ravine full of caves and sepulchers. There were fountains of sweet water and an abundance of wild fruits.

THE GAME OF DOEG

The mountain goats sprang lightly from cliff to cliff. There were abandoned sheep-cotes around the mouth of the cave. These they repaired and used for their own flocks, for they had managed to collect a few sheep and goats, which furnished them milk for their daily food as well as meat occasionally.

In this place they enjoyed several weeks' rest, and hither David's spies brought news that King Saul had won a great victory over the Philistines, and was returning with three thousand picked men, to take David in his stronghold. Then David sent out other spies, and they came back and confirmed the report of the first. King Saul was come in very deed, with three thousand chosen men at his back, and they were pitching their tents and laying out their camp on a hill not far distant. They were so near that from certain sheltered points of their stronghold, David and his men could easily watch their movements without being seen themselves. The cave in which they were lodged was large enough to hold all the men, but the opening, being small, gave no evidence of the space within. The sheep and goats lay all around within and without the opening.

The restless spirit of the king could not brook a moment's delay, and he started alone up a narrow path on the side of the cliff, which chanced to lead to the very spot where his quarry lay hidden. The

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

watchers saw him approaching, and they took the news to David.

“Thy enemy is coming, even the king that seeketh thy life. Look how he cometh on, unsuspecting, like a lion into a strong net.”

Great excitement prevailed in the cave, though the men spoke in whispers, and moved about noiselessly.

“Thou mayest avenge thyself, David,” said the student Gad, who had developed warlike propensities during his sojourn in the mountains.

“Do him the honor to cut off his head with the sword of Goliath,” said the warrior Abishai, jocosely. “There he cometh in at the cave’s mouth among the sheep. Now is thy time!”

“God putteth him in thy way,” was the pious remark of the young priest Abiathar.

The king, on entering the cave from the daylight, could scarcely see a hand’s breadth before his face, but the men standing silently in its deep recesses, having been there some time, were accustomed to the darkness, and could see perfectly well. They watched eagerly for the propitious moment, when David should step forward and behead his royal foe with one blow of Goliath’s sword. His majesty groped about among the sheep for a few moments, as if expecting to find a keeper, for he had no doubt but that they belonged to some mountain shepherd. Presently he composed himself, as if to rest, and, being in

THE GAME OF DOEG

reality greatly fatigued, he fell almost immediately into a sound sleep.

“ Now is thy time ! ” whispered Abishai to David, and David went forward, sword in hand, while they craned their necks to see. The blow was quickly given and dexterously, and he returned to his men bearing a strip of the king’s cloak in his hand.

“ I tell ye now, my men, ” he said, facing their astonished gaze, “ neither at this time nor at any future time shall my hand be raised against the life of the king. He may die of his malady, or he may die in battle against his enemies, or the hand of the Lord may be upon him, but not mine. It repenteth me now that I have done so much and offered insult to my king. Ye shall none of you raise a weapon against him. Let him go free. It is my wish.”

Many fingers fairly ached to string a bow and send an arrow into the heart of the sleeping king, for his cruel tyranny had been the cause of much suffering among his subjects, but David’s wish was law. The king awoke after some time and left the cave, unmolested. He had gone only a little way down the path, when David followed, bidding his men keep out of sight. He stood in the sheep-cote in front of the cave’s mouth, and called,

“ My lord the king ! ”

The monarch faced around suddenly, astonishment



THE MONARCH FACED AROUND SUDDENLY

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

and consternation written in every line of his care-worn face.

“O my father,” David cried out, “why dost thou listen to wicked men, when they tell thee David seeketh to hurt thee? Why art thou suspicious of thy best friends? Words may be either false or true, but actions speak louder than words. See, my father, yea, see this piece of thy cloak in my hand, and when I cut it off, I could as easily have done the same to thy head. If thou hadst found me in thy power, wouldst thou have let thy opportunity slip? My men bade me kill thee, but my heart spared thee. I have not sinned against thee, O king, my father, yet thou huntest my very soul, to take it. Thou wouldst kill me without cause. But my hand shall never be upon thee in any case. The Lord shall judge between thee and me and deliver me out of thy hand.”

“Is this thy voice, my son David?” burst in agony from the king’s lips. His giant frame, taller than that of other men from the shoulders up, was convulsed with sobs. For several moments he could not control his voice enough to speak. At last he said, “Thou hast rewarded me good for evil, for what other man, if he found his enemy, would let him go away safe? Thou art far better than I. Now I know that thou shalt surely be king over all Israel. The Lord is on thy side, and I am left alone, because of my sins. But swear to me now, David, my son, that

THE GAME OF DOEG

when thou art king in my place, thou wilt not, for that I have done thee evil, destroy my children."

"I swear to save and preserve thy house," David answered, deeply moved.

The king went back to his troops, and, without explaining anything, ordered the campaign to be given up and the men to return home.

But the crafty Doeg put spies upon David's track, and he worked constantly to move the king to further action against his son-in-law. Knowing that David and his followers were still in the caves in the mountains, he persuaded the king to make another expedition, this time with a small force, which might penetrate the mountain country undiscovered. To this Saul at last agreed.

One morning, when the birds and other woodland creatures were just beginning to stir, David and Abiathar the priest, with the warrior Abishai and the student Gad, were sitting in the back part of a cave, planning together what to do. Abishai, who was on guard, espied shepherds climbing up and apparently searching for lost sheep. They had come so quietly that they were very near when the warrior discovered them. Abishai signaled quickly to David and the others to keep silence until the strangers passed by.

Directly in front of the cave the shepherds paused, and the men within heard a voice say: "Desist from fruitless search here, for, behold, a spider hath

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

woven her web clear across the opening, sure proof that none hath entered lately.”

“That was the voice of my lord the king,” said David, when the shepherds were beyond reach of his voice, “and only yesterday I expressed a doubt of God’s wisdom in creating a thing so apparently useless as a spider. How wonderful are His works!”

King Saul, for he it was in truth, with his body-guard, disguised as shepherds, left the mountain heights without having discovered David.

On the way to the royal city they were met by a messenger, running to bring the news that Samuel, the just judge, whom the king feared, the man of God, whom the people loved, was dead. The whole nation mourned for him. Many of their sons had been educated in his schools, many had received alms at his hands, many had had their wrongs righted by his wise judgment. The king mourned with the people, for now the time was past when he could bring about reconciliation with Judge Samuel.

After the days of mourning were over, Doeg, the mischief-maker, began to whisper into the king’s willing ear, that now the judge was gone, and David had his own head, there would be trouble.

“He may not,” said Doeg, “lay his own hands on thee to harm thee, but his followers have no such scruples. They are constantly increasing. Thy life is not safe a moment. Thou mayest be murdered in

THE GAME OF DOEG

thy bed. And why give up thy son's succession to the throne? Let the king gather his forces and hunt this would-be usurper to the death."

So the king was over-persuaded. He gathered a large army, and went chasing after his son-in-law again. David was in the wilderness with his band. He had left the cave, for he considered it no longer a safe place for him after the king had found it out. He sat in his tent one day with Abishai, the great fighting man, when a spy brought the intelligence that the king with his army lay encamped a few hours' journey from them.

"Tell not this news to anyone," David commanded, "but go back to thy watch."

Then he asked Abishai if he would like to go with him to visit the king's camp by night. Abishai said he would like nothing better than such an adventure.

They set off soon after dark, and reached the camp shortly after midnight. The night was dark, but they could easily distinguish the setting of the camp, with the king's tent in the center. Every soul seemed to be wrapped in profoundest slumber. David and his companion made their way cautiously to the king's tent, often stepping over the bodies of the sleeping men. They entered and sought out the spot on which King Saul lay with Abner and the armed men around him. In spite of the darkness, they knew which one

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

was the king, by the spear that stuck straight up in the ground at his head.

“Let us pin him to the earth with his own spear,” whispered Abishai. “I shall not have to strike the second time, I promise thee.”

“Nay, Abishai, thou art a good friend and lovest my interest, but I will not let thee do this wicked thing. Let the Lord smite him, or let him perish in battle.”

“I pray thee, David, let me kill him as he lies. Thou art too soft-hearted for thine own interest. Doth he not hunt thee as if thou wert a partridge in the mountains?”

“Touch him not, he shall live out his span. Who may put out his hand against the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless? But take the spear at his head and the bottle of water that standeth by his bolster, and let us go.”

“It must be as thou wilt, I suppose, but I am of a mind to be angry with thee for letting such a chance pass by,” Abishai declared. “Here, put that fellow’s ax at his feet, and hang this bow in a tree. Let us leave plenty of marks of our visit.”

“I will help thee at that game right heartily, so thou injurest no one,” returned David.

So they played all manner of pranks on the sleeping soldiers as they passed through the camp, and went away without having aroused anybody. After

THE GAME OF DOEG

crossing the brook and ascending a steep hill, they stopped and looked back. It was still very dark.

“ I have a mind to call out to them and affright them,” said David.

“ Do thus,” said the man of war.

David made a trumpet with his hands.

“ Abner! Abner! Abner! ” he called, as loud as he could. “ Wilt thou not answer, Abner? ”

“ Who calleth Abner? ” came the reply after a moment.

“ Ho, Abner! Abner! Is thy lord the king safe? ” David cried back.

“ Who art thou that criest to the king? ”

“ Ho, Abner, art thou not a valiant man? Who is so brave as thou in the kingdom of Israel? ”

“ Who calleth Abner? ”

“ Abner! Abner! Wherefore hast thou not kept thy lord the king in safety? Just now there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. How is it that thou sleepest? Ho, Abner! What ails thee, Abner? ”

“ Who is it that calleth Abner? ”

“ Thou art worthy to die, Abner, because thou hast not guarded thy master, the Lord’s anointed. Look now and see where the king’s spear is, and his bottle of water that stood at his bolster, and thou wilt learn what mighty misfortune thy lord the king hath escaped.”

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

By this time the king had roused himself from his deep sleep. "It is David's voice," he cried to Abner, and then he called aloud, "Is this thy voice, my son David?"

Then David replied from the hilltop: "It is my voice, my lord, O king. Wherefore dost thou pursue after me? What have I done? What evil is in mine hand? Why doth the king of Israel hunt after his son David, as one hunteth a partridge in the mountains?"

"O my son David, I have played the fool and I have sinned, but I will do thee no more harm," exclaimed King Saul, contritely.

The whole camp was now awake and groping about in the darkness, to find misplaced weapons and articles of clothing. The king perceived that David had been in the camp, and again had had it in his power to take his life, but had spared it. He was humbled once more, and he called back again through the darkness, "Return to thine own home, David! I will never molest thee again, for thou hast spared my life these two times."

"Let one of thy young men come over and fetch the king's spear and the bottle of water," David answered. "He will find them here on a great stone."

"I will not molest thee, David," called the king again. "Thou hast spared my life this night. Thou

THE GAME OF DOEG

shalt do great things. Blessed be thou, my son David."

"Trust the king no more," counseled the warrior Abishai. "Put no faith in his promises. He hath set his heart to kill thee."

"That is true, Abishai," said David, sadly. "I shall perish one day by the hand of King Saul. To-night the king repenteth the wrongs he hath done me, but to-morrow he will follow evil counselors again. There is nothing to do now but escape into the land of the Philistines. Then King Saul will despair of finding me, and so I shall escape from him."

David and Abishai went back to their own camp, and before it was light they were on the march into the land of the Philistines, with the band, now numbering six hundred fighting men, and the women and children and all the stuff. They marched to a place called Gath, where lived King Achish, who was friendly to David. Achish had been very much pleased at hearing about some of David's exploits, and his good opinion was confirmed when he met the young man. He gave him a pleasant country town, called Ziklag, to live in with his soldiers and their families. Knowing that David was at war with his own people, he thought that he might win him over to be permanently on the Philistines' side.

David and his men had lived in Ziklag for more

A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

than a year, and had brought all their possessions thither and a goodly number of camels and cattle. King Saul did not dare cross the borders of the Philistines, to look for David, but the Philistines began to gather their armies together, to go against Saul once more. So King Achish, wishing to furnish a large and imposing army from his part of the country, came to David, and said:

“Thou wilt surely take thy band of warriors and go into battle with us against King Saul, our common enemy?”

“Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do,” said David, readily.

“That is well,” replied Achish, very much pleased, “and if we win the battle, I will reward thee greatly. The troops will be assembled at Gath. Do thou march there with thy men on the morrow.”

“Wouldst thou lead us to fight against our own people?” inquired the warrior Abishai anxiously after King Achish was gone.

“We cannot do otherwise than appear willing to do so,” replied David, “but something will take place to prevent our shedding the blood of our own kinsmen, thou wilt see.”

So David and all his soldiers marched to Gath the next day, as David had promised, but the princes of the Philistines were not so friendly as King Achish had been. They were suspicious of the young man,

THE GAME OF DOEG

who was the hero of the famous battle with Goliath. Immediately some of the princes of the Philistines took King Achish aside, and asked him what he had brought the Hebrews for.

“Why,” explained the king, “this is David, who has been driven out of his own land by King Saul. He hath lived in the town of Ziklag, which I gave him, for a year, and I have no fault to find with him. He will fight on our side.”

“Never believe that,” cried the chief lord of the princes, angrily. “Make this fellow return with his fighting men to the town thou gavest him. Is not this David, of whom they tell us the Hebrew women sang, ‘Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’ See what sturdy fellows he hath with him. As soon as they get into the thick of the fight, they will join their own people against us, and David will become reconciled to King Saul with the heads of our men.”

King Achish went back to David and told him how the princes of the Philistines felt about having the Hebrews fight with them. David was very glad in his heart that he would not have to fight against his own people, but, wanting to keep friends with Achish, he said, “What have I done? Why may I not go with my men to fight against the enemies of my lord the king?”

“I know thou art good, David,” returned King

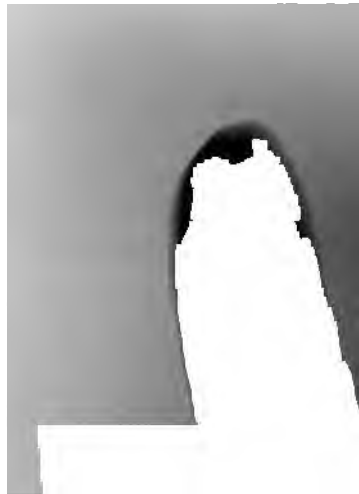
A PARTRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

Achish, “ but the princes of the Philistines say thou shalt not go, and so it will be best for thee to march back to Ziklag as soon as it is light.”

Very gladly David marched back to his little city with his men.

“ I told thee we should not have to fight against our own people,” he said to Abishai.

On the third day of the march, as they approached the town that had become dear to their hearts, because it held their loved ones, they saw smoke ascending from it, from all parts at once it seemed.



CHAPTER XII

THE WITCH OF ENDOR



THE soldiers broke ranks and rushed on in dismay, sobbing and crying out loud as they ran. The whole town lay in ruins. All the houses were burnt, and the smoke that arose was from the sticks that were yet smouldering. There was nothing alive left in the town, either great or small. The women and children were gone, and the camels and all the cattle and the sheep. In their first anger and despair, the soldiers wanted to stone David for leading them to Gath to fight for the Philistines against their own people, and leaving their families and possessions unprotected; but Abiathar, the young priest, the warrior Abishai, and the student Gad stood by him, and together they calmed the excited soldiers, and made them listen to reason.

“Come, my brave fellows,” shouted Abishai, “nobody is killed, our wives and children are safe. You do not see dead bodies anywhere, do you? They have been carried off alive by the enemy. Let us follow and rescue them, and get back our goods as well!”

Thus encouraged, the men stopped their useless weeping, and went in pursuit. The trail was not hard

THE WITCH OF ENDOR

to follow, and they soon came upon a young manservant lying in a field. He was able to give them some information. They found that he belonged to the enemy that had destroyed their city, and his master had left him behind in the field, because he was sick, and could not march. He had had nothing to eat nor a drop of water for three days. The student Gad hurried to bring him some water, and the warrior Abishai gave him a cake of figs and some raisins out of his own store of provisions, and very soon he was able to talk freely. David questioned him, and he said:

“The Amalekites made an invasion through all this part of the country, and I was with my master, and we burnt Ziklag to the ground, and took away all the women and children and all the cattle and camels and the stuff in the houses. The Amalekites had information from their spies, that David and all his fighting men were going to join the forces of the Philistines and leave Ziklag unprotected.”

“Dost thou know which way they went? Canst thou lead us down to this company?”

The young man fell on his knees, exclaiming: “Swear not to kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master again, and I will lead thee down, and I will be thy servant.”

When David had assured the poor fellow that he would be protected, he led the way in the direction

THE GAME OF DOEG

which he knew the cavalcade had taken. David and his men marched with great caution, and at twilight they came upon the camp, spread out over a large piece of ground. The spoilers were eating and drinking and dancing and rejoicing over the great spoil they had secured. None had been left on guard. David's forces fell upon them so unexpectedly that they offered no resistance whatever. A few of the younger men ran to the camels, which were feeding in another section of the camp, mounted them, and escaped. All the rest were cut down before they could arm themselves.

The wives of the men and their sons and daughters were found safe with the stolen goods, and also a considerable number of cattle and camels, and an abundance of goods that had belonged to the marauding party. David and his band made a triumphal march back to their village, with more possessions than they had ever had before. They began at once to build up their burnt dwellings and to put everything in order, and out of the treasure taken from the enemy David sent a present to all his friends in the vicinity of Ziklag who had been kind to him in past times. To every place where he and his followers were wont to go and be received kindly, he sent a gift.

During this time the lords of the Philistines were gathering their forces by hundreds and by thousands and putting their army into battle array against the

THE WITCH OF ENDOR

Hebrews. They knew that Judge Samuel, upon whom King Saul and his people had depended so much for guidance, was dead. They knew that King Saul was losing favor and the love of his people, and that the kingdom was divided, because of the trouble between the king and his son-in-law. It was a very good time to make war, they thought, and with every chance of winning.

King Saul was overwhelmed with fear and perplexity. He had the war trumpets sounded in every part of his kingdom, to call all the fighting men together, and then he wished, O how he wished, that his good friend Judge Samuel were alive. He had reached the point where his proud spirit was ready to obey the commands of the Lord, if only the commands were made known to him. The poor king had always trusted in his own strength, or followed the advice of evil men, because it pleased him, and now he was in terrible despair, because he had no one to depend upon.

Many months had passed since he had consulted any of the priests of God, and they had no love for him. He had caused many of their number living in the priests' city of Nob to be killed, because David had received food there and the sword of Goliath. Nevertheless, in this extremity he called in the priests, and besought them to pray to God for him and find out what he must do to save his people from the

THE GAME OF DOEG

Philistines. And the priests prayed to God, not for love of King Saul, but because the danger to all the people was very great and very near. Every hour added to the host of the enemy gathering around them. But God did not answer any of their prayers, and they could give the king no hope and no advice.

In those days all the people put great faith in dreams, and, failing to get any help from the priests, the king vainly besought the Lord to come to him, if only in a dream, and tell him what to do. But no saving dream came to him during the short hours of his troubled sleep. Disappointed in this too, his dark, superstitious spirit resolved in desperation to seek a fortune-teller or witch. But here there was another difficulty. He himself had caused all the enchanters, consulters of spirits, and witches to be put to death. If there were any left, they were living against his supreme command, and condemned to death, should they be discovered. And yet King Saul resolved to find out if any such person lived in the land. He called Abner, the captain of his host, and said, "Seek me out a woman who can call up the spirits of the dead, that I may go to her and inquire what to do."

"O king, thou didst destroy out of the land all such as call up the spirits, and all witches and such as deal in the arts of magic. How shall I find such a woman?"

THE WITCH OF ENDOR

Abner turned pale, and his voice trembled. The king noticed it even in his own distress.

“Why dost thou turn pale and tremble in all thy bones, O Abner?” he exclaimed. “Thou hast certain knowledge of some witch or diviner. I command thee to speak out.”

Abner fell upon his knees before the king, and pleaded: “Swear unto me, O king, as I have served thee faithfully all these years, to spare the life of this woman, if I bring thee unto her.”

“As the Lord liveth, O Abner, no harm shall come unto this woman, whoever she may be. But what is she to thee, O Abner?”

“She is my mother.”

“Thy mother!”

“It is the truth, O king, as the Lord liveth. When thou didst command all such to be killed, then I took my mother and hid her in a cave in the mountains at Endor. She is called the Witch of Endor and sometimes the Cave-Dwelling Woman.”

“Fear not, O Abner. Shall the king in his extremity bring the law upon the woman thy mother, or upon thee, the faithful captain of my host, and so destroy the last chance of help that he hath? Take me to her.”

With this assurance from the king, Abner arose from his knees.

“In order to reach the cave where she lives, we

THE GAME OF DOEG

must pass over the shoulder of the ridge upon which the Philistines are encamped," he explained.

"We shall disguise ourselves as shepherds," said the king. "Call thou one servant to go with us, and tell no one else, and bring shepherds' clothes for all of us. We have no time to lose."

At midnight there came a knocking at the door of the cave in the mountain-side over the ridge where the Philistines' army lay, and when the Witch of Endor opened it cautiously, to find out who was calling upon her so late, she saw three shepherds, one head and shoulders taller than the other two, but she did not recognize Abner, her son, for he was well disguised. He changed his voice too when he spoke to her, and said, "We are three shepherds, who have heard of the special powers ascribed unto thee, and we desire to question thee."

The witch opened the door wider, and the three entered a cavernous room, lighted only by one little lamp standing on a shelf of rock.

"What is your will, O travelers?" she asked, looking sharply first at one and then at the other, to find out what sort of men they were.

"Bring up him whom I shall name unto thee," said the king.

"But thou knowest what King Saul hath done," she replied, "how he hath destroyed all such as I, and all who call up the spirits of the dead and read the

THE WITCH OF ENDOR

future things. Now, why shouldst thou lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?"

"I swear unto thee, as the Lord liveth, there shall no punishment happen unto thee for this thing."

The witch seemed satisfied, and she asked, "Whom shall I bring up unto thee, O tall traveler?"

"Bring me up the spirit of Samuel," returned the king.

The woman started visibly in surprise. Who in all the land would dare call for the spirit of Judge Samuel? She felt that she was entertaining some illustrious visitor.

The small lamp burnt so dimly that the room was very dark as she proceeded with her incantations, and finally called in a loud voice, "O Samuel, I bid thee arise."

She repeated the command three times. The king and Abner and the servant had fallen prostrate upon their faces on the floor of the cave. When she had called three times, she uttered a loud exclamation of alarm, and, turning upon the prostrate king, she cried out: "Why hast thou deceived me? Thou art King Saul."

"Be not afraid," answered the trembling king. "What seest thou?"

"I see an old man of glorious personage. He hath flowing white hair, which falls upon each side

THE GAME OF DOEG

of his face, and a white beard. He is appareled in a priest's mantle, and he seemeth divine."

The king knew that this must be the spirit of Judge Samuel, and trembling more and more, with his kingly face pressed to the ground, he heard the well-remembered voice of Samuel, saying,

"Saul, Saul, why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?"

In agony of soul the king answered: "I am sore distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

"Wherefore, then, dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? Hear, O Saul! The Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand and given it to thy neighbor, even to David, because thou didst not obey the voice of the Lord. The Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines, and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons fall in battle."

As the spirit finished these ominous words, the stricken king fell at full length, fainting, to the floor, and terror filled the heart of the poor Witch of Endor, but great pity for King Saul rose within her. Abner and his servant were lifting the king up, and Abner, forgetting to disguise his voice, groaned out,



"WHY HAST THOU DISQUIETED ME, TO BRING ME UP?"

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

THE WITCH OF ENDOR

“He hath eaten nothing all day nor yet this night, and this forecast of his misfortune hath overcome him.”

“Abner, my son!” exclaimed the witch.

“Yes, thy son, O my mother, and we are in the midst of terrible times. Prepare what food thou hast, to revive thy king, for we must go back to the camp, and set the battle in array in the morning.”

The witch prepared meat and bread as quickly as she could, and they urged the king to eat.

“I will eat and strengthen myself for the battle,” he said at length, “for I must lead my host against the Philistines to-morrow. Thou wilt survive me, O Abner! Tell my people that I, with my sons, died as brave men should.”

When they had finished eating, they left the Witch of Endor, and went back over the mountains, past the camp of the enemy, and reached their own camp before daylight.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA



THE rising sun looked upon two armies drawn up for battle, the Israelitish army near the heights of Mount Gilboa, and the Philistine hosts spread out in seemingly endless rank and file, with their iron chariots and war-horses below them.

There were great numbers of skilled archers in the Philistine army, and they picked off the Israelitish soldiers at a distance before they came to close combat, and this threw the Israelites into a panic and great disorder.

They retreated up into the heights of Mount Gilboa, and attempted to rally themselves, but in vain. King Saul and his three sons, of whom Jonathan was the eldest, fought like heroes, and the king's armor-bearer, who was the son of Doeg, kept as close as he could to his master in the fight. The Philistines directed their attack mainly against the quarter where they were stationed. Jonathan and his two brothers, rushing into the thickest of the fight to defend the king, their father, were overwhelmed by numbers, and slain one after another.

THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA

Still the mighty King Saul, head and shoulders above his men, fought with desperation, determined to sell his life dearly. The iron chariots of the foe, with sharp, two-edged swords sticking out of the spokes of the wheels, dealt death with every revolution, and the brave Hebrew soldiers were slain by hundreds and by thousands in their own mountain heights.

At last King Saul fell, exhausted with fatigue and the loss of blood from many wounds received from the arrows of the enemy. He had seen his three sons fall before him in the battle, and he knew that his own time was close at hand. Unable to fight any longer, he feared to be taken alive by the enemy. He called to his armor-bearer, "Draw thy sword and thrust me through therewith, lest these Philistines take me alive."

But the armor-bearer hesitated to draw the sword and give his king the fatal stroke. Then King Saul took a short sword, and leaned upon the point, and fell upon it himself.

When the son of Doeg saw that the king was dead and the Philistines closing in upon every spot, he fell upon his own sword, and died beside his king. So King Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer all died that same day together, in the fierce battle on Mount Gilboa, and the Philistines won a great victory.

THE GAME OF DOEG

Doeg, the chief steward of the king's household, constable to the king, and keeper of the royal mules, was in the great battle too, armed with a great sword, the one with which he had killed the priests of Nob at King Saul's command, but he took care to keep out of the thick of it. In the morning, just before the battle, he had heard from the king and Abner about their visit to the Witch of Endor and its result. He had held to the interests of King Saul as long as they benefited him, and kept him in his high position, but when he saw the king and his sons fallen in battle, he knew that he must win favor with David, or all would be lost for him. A plan occurred to him there upon the battle-field, and he decided to carry it out. All the Israelites had fled, or had been killed, and as it was growing dark, the Philistines withdrew their men from the field, to rest until morning before stripping the bodies of the dead Israelites upon the battle-field. Then Doeg crept down to where the body of King Saul lay stretched out, surrounded by his slain sons and the fallen soldiers. For a moment, seeing his masters so humbled, this man, who had proved true to no one, felt ashamed, because he had not fought beside the king and his sons. "But," he muttered, "in that case I should now be even as they are," and he took the crown that still encircled the temples of the dead monarch and the bracelet upon

THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA

his arm above the elbow, and started immediately to run to David in Ziklag.

As he turned, his foot caught under one of the dead bodies, and, stooping to save himself from a fall, he saw beneath him the face of his own son, Saul's armor-bearer. Horrified, he exclaimed, "Foolish youth! Did I not tell thee to fall back to the rear?"

He stooped to lift the lifeless form and carry it away, but, hearing the voices of Philistine soldiers on the slope below, he knew that he had no time to do more than save himself. Clutching his sword and the crown and bracelet, he sped away into the darkness.

It was on the third day after David and his six hundred fighting men had returned from their slaughter of the Amalekites, and brought back their families, who had been stolen away from them, that Doeg entered the little city with his clothing torn and earth on his head as a sign of deep grief. At sight of the king's steward in such a plight, David at once surmised the worst, and asked him quickly, "From whence comest thou, O Doeg?"

"Out of the camp of Israel I am escaped."

"How went the battle, I pray thee?"

"The people are fled from the battle, O son of Jesse, and many of them are fallen, and King Saul, and Jonathan, his son, and his two other sons, and the king's armor-bearer, even my own son, are dead also."

THE GAME OF DOEG

“ How knowest thou that King Saul and Jonathan, his son, be dead? ”

“ I was in the battle upon Mount Gilboa, O David, and the battle turned against the Hebrews, and, behold, the king leaned upon his spear, wounded, and the chariots and the horsemen followed hard after him, and he looked behind him, and saw me, and called unto me, and I answered, ‘ Here am I. ’ ”

“ And then what, O Doeg? ”

“ Then he said unto me, ‘ Stand upon me, I pray thee, and slay me, for the anguish of death is upon me, and yet my life is whole in me. ’ So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after he was fallen, and I took the crown that was upon his head and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them unto thee, my lord. ”

David put out his hand, and took the king’s crown and the bracelet, and then he said, “ How was it thou wast not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed? It were better thou hadst died beside him. ”

Doeg’s teeth began to chatter in his head at this question and at David’s stern look, but he managed to stammer, “ I did think thou wouldst applaud the deed, O David, for knowest thou not that thou art now the king of Israel? ”

But David began to weep and mourn for King Saul and Prince Jonathan, and he called one of his

THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA

young men to go near to Doeg and smite him to death.

“But I am thy friend, O David,” cried Doeg. “Remember it was I that first sent for thee to come to Saul’s court when thou wast a minstrel boy.”

“Take his sword from him,” David commanded, and instantly the young soldier took the great sword from Doeg’s hand.

“Perchance it is the same with which thou didst slay the priests of Nob,” continued David.

“It is the same,” returned Doeg, stolidly, giving up all hope.

“It is the right weapon for thine execution,” said David, at the same time giving a sign to the soldier to cut off Doeg’s head.

The poor wretch, realizing that his last hour had come, looked helplessly around, while the men formed a circle enclosing Doeg and his executioner, the latter a stalwart young fellow. Doeg trembled so that his knees knocked together, for he saw that he had forfeited his own life in trying to win David’s favor by saying that he had destroyed King Saul. He might as easily have told the truth of the matter, that King Saul had fallen upon his own sword, and so died; but he had thought to win more favor from David by saying that he had struck the final blow himself.

“Dost thou remember little Ben?” asked the young soldier of Doeg. “And dost thou remember

THE GAME OF DOEG

the day thou didst frighten him and hurt him, there by the vineyards on the hillside of Bethlehem, when he was running to his master David in the field? I see recognition in thy hateful eyes. Yes, I was that little slave."

"Do thy work quickly," was Doeg's stoical answer, and, bending his neck, he received the blow that cut off his head. So died the man who had tried to play with kings and move them to his will.

David felt no triumph over the fact that he had in his possession the king's crown and bracelet, or that the death of Saul and Jonathan left a way to the throne open for him. He thought only of the grace and beauty and nobility of King Saul when his mind was unclouded, and of the love of Jonathan, which had never failed him, and he cried out: "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places. How are the mighty fallen!"

His friends tried in vain to comfort him. Realizing the disgrace it was for the Hebrew soldiers to have thrown away their shields and fled before the enemy, he wept the more, and he rent his garments, and exclaimed: "Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of corn any more, for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away. There fell the Lord's anointed, even though the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA

“Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles. They were stronger than lions. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!

“O Jonathan, thou art slain! I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan. How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished!”

Soon after the battle of Mount Gilboa and the death of King Saul and his three sons, David was anointed king over a part of the people. King Saul had left one son yet alive, and Abner, the captain of his host, supported this son, and made him king over the other part. So for a while there were two kings in the land, and frequent wars occurred between the two factions. David's wife Michal was guarded by the king, her brother, and was not permitted to return to King David, her husband, but David sent for his father and mother in the land of Moab, and brought them to live with him.

The new king, whom Abner supported so loyally, was of a jealous disposition, like his father. Finally Abner gave him up, and offered to go over to David's side, and help him make a united kingdom. Immediately King David sent a servant to Abner with this message: “Well, I will join hands with thee upon one condition: Bring to me, when thou comest,

THE GAME OF DOEG

my wife Michal, King Saul's daughter, for whose dowry I gave two hundred heads of the Philistines."

So Abner, who was very powerful in the land, sent and brought the Princess Michal, with all her retinue of servants and ladies in waiting, back to her husband, who had not seen her since that fateful night when she let him down from the little window over the city wall. That was a day of rejoicing in David's house.

In the course of time all the Hebrew people acknowledged David as their king, but he never forgot his love for Prince Jonathan, and he wrote a song to his memory and called it the "Song of the Bow." And in after years when the young men practised archery through all the beautiful hills and valleys of Palestine, they sang the "Song of the Bow."

Then, when little children came to live in the house of David and Michal, the king would take them in his arms, or they would gather close around him, and he would sing brave songs to them, recounting the exploits of his youth. They ran something like this:

I was small amongst my brothers,
And the youngest in my father's house;
I was feeding my father's sheep.

In the Lord's name I slew a lion and a bear.
My hands made a harp, and my fingers fitted a psaltery,
And who shall tell it to the Lord?
He is the Lord, He heareth.

THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA

He sent His messenger, and took me from my
father's flocks,
And anointed me with oil of His anointing.
My brethren were beautiful and tall,
But the Lord was not well pleased with them.

I went out to meet the Philistine,
And he cursed me by his idols;
But I drew his own sword and beheaded him,
And made all the people of Israel shout for joy.

